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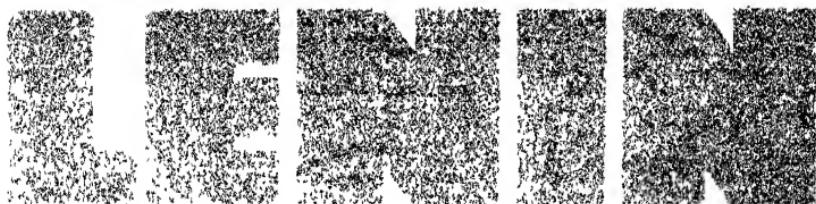
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# About



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EDITED BY GEORGE HANNA

РАССКАЗЫ О ЛЕНИНЕ

*На английском языке*

# CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<b>A. Lunacharsky</b>	
LEADER OF THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION	<b>5</b>
<b>A. Kollontai</b>	
A GIANT OF SPIRIT AND WILL	<b>9</b>
THE VOICE OF LENIN	<b>12</b>
<b>V. Vorovsky</b>	
V. I. ULYANOV-LENIN	<b>17</b>
<b>M. Gorky</b>	
V. I. LENIN	<b>23</b>
<b>V. Bonch-Bruevich</b>	
HOW VLADIMIR ILYICH WROTE THE DECREE ON LAND	<b>49</b>
THE ARMS OF THE SOVIET STATE	<b>56</b>
<b>A. Bek</b>	
LENIN'S LETTER	<b>61</b>
<b>S. Antonov</b>	
PETITIONER AT THE KREMLIN	<b>79</b>
THE MESSENGER FROM PAKHOMOVKA	<b>90</b>
<b>S. Dangulov</b>	
THE MANDATE	<b>105</b>
FRIEND	<b>124</b>
<b>Y. Drabkina</b>	
ALYOSHA KALENOV'S DRAWINGS	<b>135</b>
<b>S. Ghil</b>	
ATTEMPT ON LENIN'S LIFE	<b>145</b>
<b>I. Aramilev</b>	
RECREATION	<b>157</b>
<b>Workers on Lenin</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>L. Radishchev</b>	
NO PLATES!	<b>193</b>
<b>S. Vinogradskaya</b>	
ANNIVERSARY	<b>203</b>



Lenin the schoolboy with his family. Simbirsk. 1879

Next two pages

Lenin at the age of four with his sister Olga Simbirsk, 1874

Lenin at the time of graduation from school. Simbirsk, 1887

# A. LUNACHARSKY

Academician Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-1933) was an outstanding figure in Soviet culture. He joined a Social-Democratic organisation at the age of seventeen, and contributed to the Bolshevik newspapers **Wpered** and **Proletary** under Lenin's guidance. He was People's Commissar for Education of the R.S.F.S.R. for many years after the October Revolution.

Lunacharsky was a brilliant speaker and journalist, a specialist in the history of Russian and West-European literature, and the author of several plays and a number of critical works on Soviet literature.

Lenin and Lunacharsky with a group of comrades after laying the foundation-stone of the monument to "Emancipated Labour"  
Moscow, May 1, 1920

**LEADER  
OF THE  
PROLETARIAN  
REVOLUTION**

**L**ike most philistines, the historians of the idealist school have always been inclined to think that history is made by outstanding individuals, particularly by those vested with authority—by kings and ministers. When they are confronted with imposing revolutionary figures who have risen to the pinnacle of authority from below they are ready to ascribe the revolution itself mostly to the talent, energy, subtlety, and skill of these leaders.

Marxist historians attribute historic events to great social processes moulded by the will of no one, but depending, in the final analysis, on the pattern of the struggle between the classes the relative strength and aims of which are determined by their roles in social production at any given time.

This has led some to believe that Marxism grudges the great man a role in history, and simply refuses to acknowledge him.

It would be strange, however, if great individuals received no recognition from Marxism which itself derives its very name from a great man.

The contrary is true, for Marxist history, and Marxist practice especially, pays great attention to the individual. Before anyone is appointed to a post of any responsibility the Central Committee of our Party discusses his character very seriously from the point of view of his strength and organisational ability.

Marxists are not votaries of chance. Knowing that a revolution cannot be made, but must inevitably happen, we well understand that it can either be unorganised, chaotic, or can be largely channelled and directed by the minds of its vanguard, if not of its participants at large. The strength of the proletariat as a revolutionary class, as distinct, for instance, from the peasantry, is in its amenability to organisation and quicker selection of its own organisers.

The proletariat is the organiser class that first had to win the country and must now put it on its feet... It could not, of course, do this without some sort of headquarters collecting data from all sides and issuing co-ordinated instructions in return, where the most valuable experience could be accumulated and plans for future action be crystallised. For complete systematisation, moreover, such a staff, of necessity numerous, must have a single brain, a single unifying will vested with no judicial authority, nothing, therefore, in the nature of a monarch or dictator, but commanding authority through a wealth of experience, through self-restraint and a penetrating intellect.

Revolution unearths colossal strata of the population hitherto isolated from participation in government. One may, naturally, expect that in due course a certain number of highly gifted individuals will emerge among these people.

Add to this the fact that revolutionary movements, while still under cover, are headed by people of supremely practical and invincible courage, that they come through the harsh school of underground activities and harrowing struggle, and you will see why vast revolutions must produce great leaders.

The world has never known a revolution as broad, and prepared for in such prolonged struggle as the social revolution in Russia.... It was predictable, therefore, that such a revolution would be headed by men of great political acumen and exceptional firmness of character.

It is not by chance that our Party is headed by a great man. It could not be otherwise. The magnitude of his gifts and the invincibility of his will reflect the breadth and scale of our revolution, and particularly the unprecedented features of its chief motive force—the working class.

Lenin in the Presidium of the First  
Comintern Congress, Kremlin  
March 1919

ДА ЗДРАВСТВУЕТ III-Я ИНТЕРНАЦИОНАЛ

Es lebe die III Internationale

VIVE LA III<sup>e</sup> INTERNACIONAL

LONG LIVE THE 3rd INTERNATIONAL

жизнь тридцати лет



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## ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI

Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952) was a Soviet diplomat. Her participation in the revolutionary movement began in the nineties; she took an active part in the October battles of 1917 and was closely acquainted with Lenin.

After the revolution she was People's Commissar for State Social Insurance, Secretary of the International Women's Secretariat of the Comintern, and Soviet Ambassador to Norway, Mexico, and Sweden.

**A GIANT  
OF SPIRIT  
AND WILL**

**T**'here are individuals—rare in history—who, born of the gathering storm of catastrophe, leave their mark on an entire epoch."Vladimir Ilyich Lenin belongs to these giants of the spirit and will.

Strong as such giants of history may be, everything narrowly individual within them is dissolved in their symbolic meaning, in the collective, universal principle which they embody. The common measure of qualities, shortcomings, and passions characteristic of the people of their epoch is not applicable to them. It is not the personal traits and qualities of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin that matter, but what he symbolises.... He has gathered within himself, as though in a focus, everything that is steel-willed, powerful, mercilessly destructive and stubbornly creative in the revolution. All who cherish the things brought in by the purifying whirlwind of the workers' revolution cannot help feeling that its symbol and embodiment, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, is near and dear to them

THE VOICE

OF ELECTRICITY

**T**he imperialist war of 1914 had begun. The Second International renounced the precepts of Marx and betrayed the interests of the working class. The leading force of the Second International—the German Social-Democratic Party—revealed its opportunistic essence. Offering a hand to its own ruling bourgeoisie it took completely to the path of peace between the classes.

I myself witnessed the day of the German Social-Democrats' shameful renunciation of the revolutionary class struggle. I was in the Reichstag on August 4, 1914, and saw the sordid picture of the fall of the leaders of the German Social-Democratic Party, saw them vote for the war budget and promise to support the government of Bethmann-Hollweg.

The smoke of the imperialist war had turned many heads. Things came to such a pass that the hypnosis of conciliation and opportunism also infected some of the Russian political emigrants who hurried back to Russia to repent of their political sins and serve their tsarist fatherland by supporting the policy of Nicholas II and his inyrmidons.

I was in despair, for it seemed to me that all was lost. The atmosphere was so stifling, so hopeless that I felt I had come up against a wall that barred all further progress. With Liebknecht's help I managed to get to Stockholm from Germany. I still believed that the Second International could be induced to oppose the world war; but just what our policies should be, or what they should be based on, was something neither I nor anyone else knew. We were lost in an impenetrable forest.

It was at that moment of utter confusion, of the collapse of the Second International, amid the exultations of the bourgeois capitalist parties extolling class unity, that the thunderous voice of Lenin was heard. Alone against the world, he gave a merciless analysis of the imperialist war exposing its essence as though he held it on the palm of

his hand, and, what was more important, clearly outlined the paths and methods of transforming that war into civil war and revolution. Those who wanted peace had to rise against opportunism and refute conciliation with one's own bourgeoisie.

Several issues of the central Party organ, *Sotsial Demokrat*, reached Stockholm from Switzerland, with Lenin's policy on war and on our problems. That was one of the most significant moments in my life. Lenin's articles shattered the wall I had been banging my head against. I felt as if I had come into the sunshine from a deep well, for I saw the path I had to follow. It was all there, clearly etched. All I had to do was follow Vladimir Ilyich in the ranks of the revolutionary working class. It was only much later that we learned that the Bureau of the Central Committee in Russia had been putting Lenin's thesis into effect.

In those days I felt that Lenin stood above the whole of mankind and could perceive what was beyond our ken by the sheer force of his vision. It was then I understood that his moral and spiritual fearlessness knew no bounds. The lower the opportunists, Kautsky and his close associates, sank, the clearer we saw the fearless and indomitable figure of the man who pointed the way in that sanguinary chaos.

In October 1914 I wrote my first letter to Vladimir Ilyich. His reply, which reached me through one of our Russian comrades, instructed me to get to work at once and contact those socialists in Scandinavia who could help to implement his policy of the further struggle of the working class. From then I began to work under his direct guidance.

At the same time Comrade S. and I were entrusted with the task of organising reliable communications between Lenin and the Central Committee Bureau in Russia through Scandinavia. These connections were duly estab-

lished and kept functioning until the conservative Swedish government of Hammerskjöld decided to close "the Bolshevik centre". I was arrested, imprisoned in Kungsholmen and then deported from Sweden. With the aid of some Norwegian friends I managed to settle at Holmenkollen near Oslo in Norway. From my little red house above the fjord my inquiries, and the articles and pamphlets written to order flew to Vladimir Ilyich. There, too, I opened the letters of Vladimir Ilyich sent to me through the addresses of friends. In the same little red house at Holmenkollen we drafted the resolution of the Norwegian Lefts, supporting the Zimmerwald Left and approved by Vladimir Ilyich.

When I thought of Vladimir Ilyich in those days, he seemed to me not merely a man, but the embodiment of elemental cosmic forces that were shifting the thousand-year old socio-economic strata of mankind. A plan was maturing and being mapped out for the greatest of all upheavals in social relations, for society's reconstruction on new principles.

The imperialist war was at its height, but that was not all. Fissures had sprung open in the social structure of society thanks to Lenin. The Second International was shattered, but new, fresh growths were springing up around Lenin. In 1915 and 1916, therefore, I found my task much easier than I had expected when Lenin instructed me to win the best, most revolutionary socialist section of the youth from the disgraced Second International and rally them round the Zimmerwald Left.

I had to cross the Atlantic twice to muster forces all the way from Boston to San Francisco and from Philadelphia to Seattle for the struggle against the imperialist war and the support of the platform of the Zimmerwald Left.



Lenin at the bookcase in his  
Kremlin study. Moscow, October  
1918

# **V. VOROVSKY**

V. V. Vorovsky (1871-1923) was a professional revolutionary, a prominent member of the Bolshevik Party, Soviet diplomat, journalist and literary critic.

He took part in the revolutionary movement from the late nineties, wrote for *Iskra* and was a loyal supporter of Lenin. After the October Revolution he represented the R.S.F.S.R. in the Scandinavian countries and later in Italy and other countries. He was the author of some brilliant essays on the Russian classics and Maxim Gorky, and also of some theoretical papers on aesthetics.

**V. I. ULYANOV-LENIN**

**T**he grand epochs of historic upheavals breed men who come to embody the spirit of the times. They are the focal points and bearers of the new, the imminent and lofty element fighting its way forward and winning the right to exist. Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov-Lenin is just such a man in this epoch, at this turning-point from capitalism to socialism.

He is like a fabulous tree that has struck root mightily and deeply among the working people of Russia, while its crown soars into those clear heights where the scientific and cultural values created by man in the course of millennia have accumulated. To the horror of the high priests and custodians of those treasures the tree has been drawing them roughly and unceremoniously down to the masses nourishing its roots. In exchange, to their still greater horror, it has been hurling the bold, imperious demands of the proletariat into their silent azure heights.

No wonder Lenin's name has come to be the symbol of the liberation of the working class not only in Russia, or in Europe, but throughout the world. No wonder millions of eyes, thoughts and emotions of the working people of the globe are focused on that corner of the Kremlin where these feelings and thoughts of millions are being mysteriously transformed by the mind and will of a single man into the fighting slogans of the masses, into the guiding stars of mighty movements.

What power must be hidden in this chosen man! What love and affection he must have won from those who have come to see him as their trusted leader!

It would be difficult to imagine more concentrated power of thought, strength of will, and depth of feeling in one man; Vladimir Ilyich is hewn from native rock without a single fissure anywhere. Everything in him fits the great general task of serving the cause of the proletar-

iat and leading it along the path of socialism. No matter how you approach him you will inevitably come up against that single but colossal idea engrossing him completely, leaving no room for other interests.

Vladimir Ilyich has a great mind for theory, but the chief thing is that theory was never of value to him for its own sake, as it would be to the professional scholar. He has always regarded it as a means of cognising the world in which the proletariat lives, the world it has to fight, the world it has been striving to rebuild. It is this close alignment of theory to the practical tasks of the mighty revolutionary class that has lent Lenin's ideas the aptness and the sharpness enabling him to forge a weapon from every premise, no matter how seemingly remote, and use it unerringly against his enemies. The telling thing here is the spiritual link between the class and its ideologist, through which the ideologist of the young, rising revolutionary class is able to draw upon the latter as upon an eternal source of inspiration.

This practical, very vital nature of Lenin's theoretical thought, this spiritual link with the masses, has given him an astonishing gift of political foresight, i.e., the faculty to trace the line of historical development in the immediate future, to gauge the prospects of the movement, to look deeply into the "unfathomed destinies" of the future. Like a watcher on a tower he can perceive coming events from afar and give his comrades-in-arms fair warning of them.

Armed with this gift for historical foresight and his deep instinct telling him of the thoughts and aspirations of the masses, Vladimir Ilyich is naturally a brilliant practical statesman. He is a master at sizing up the needs of the moment in a clear slogan, at giving simple comprehensible tasks to the masses to enable them to cope with the urgent demand of the day. Like the seasoned helmsman deftly spinning his wheel to put his ship safely through a passage sown with reefs, he wields his practi-

al slogans and tasks to guide the spontaneous movement of the masses, keeping a weather eye on the reactions of the masses to these measures and on the extent to which the separate phases of the movement conform to the general trends and aims. And no sooner has a slogan failed to justify his expectations or already done its work than the helmsman quickly and capably swings his wheel round again, producing a new slogan to guide the thought and will of the masses into new channels. Those bold turns of the helm are sometimes so sudden that even Lenin's closest associates are puzzled, wondering whether to acclaim them or to protest. Fortunately for us, realities have dispelled all doubts.

It might be thought that Vladimir Ilyich is a despot who has seized the wheel and reckons with no one. Nothing could be more erroneous. Among the favourites of destiny whom history endowed with such enormous authority not only over people, but—and this is a thousand times more important—over people's hearts, there was never one who appreciated so highly the role of man in the governmental machine. He regards others as he regards himself; this is sometimes hard on people, for he often overestimates them, assuming that they are endowed with the same gigantic strength as he, and they are chagrined when they fail to come up to his expectations. Be it as it may, he will never adopt a decision, never venture a step unless he is convinced that it is not merely his own personal opinion that is involved, but the expressed opinion of many of his associates. Those who surround him and those who meet with him frequently never suspect how much of their collective worry and solicitude, how much of their experience has inspired Vladimir Ilyich's thoughts and decisions. It is precisely this capacity to focus the experience and knowledge of many in himself as in a concave mirror, to transform all this into general ideas and slogans in the laboratory of his mind, that constitutes his rare ability.

The question naturally arises as to whether these qualities spell a gaunt dry politician to whom people are nothing more than puppets and chess figures. That assumption, too, would be wrong, for Vladimir Ilyich is fond of the people with whom he works and he fights for the interests of all. He has displayed much tenderness and solicitude for them—the manly kind of sympathy that eschews effusive words and gestures. In this too, however, he is true to himself, for the instant a man deserts his post and the ranks of the fighters, he no longer exists as far as Lenin is concerned. The struggle for the cause of the proletariat in the ranks of the Communist Party—that is the gauge that regulates Lenin's attitude to a man; "the truth" means more to him than "Plato". Here we approach the basic feature of the personal ethics so characteristic of and attractive in Lenin. There is no division in him between the general and the particular, no difference between his social and his personal life. He is hewn of a single rock in this respect, too. Completely immersed in social life, he has welded his personal existence to it. The whole of his personal life is the handmaiden of his social activity. There is no room here for inner conflicts, tragedies, compromises, or anything else from the middle-class legacy, the things that have shattered the life of more than one revolutionary intellectual. This integrity has placed him on a moral level inaccessible even to the slanderer of his enemies.

To characterise Lenin one would have to write books and books, for there is so much one is impelled to say about this man who, though plain and complete, is yet so varied and complex. Uppermost here is our desire to express in at least a few lines the reverence we feel for the greatness of this man, the affection for a friend and comrade-in-arms, harboured by all of us who have worked and are still working with him in the ranks of the Communist Party.

Lenin during his visit to Gorky  
in Capri, Italy, 1908





# MAXIM GORKY

Maxim Gorky met Lenin for the first time in December 1905 at a session of the Central Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in St. Petersburg. He came to know the leader better at the London Congress of 1907, of which he wrote in this essay.

The first version of the essay was written soon after Lenin's death in 1924. Gorky here availed himself of the notes he had used in his speech at the meeting marking Lenin's fiftieth birthday (see S. Vinogradskaya's story) on April 23, 1920. Later, in 1930, Gorky re-edited and elaborated the entire text of his recollections. The version published here is abridged. \*

**V. I. LENIN**  
**(FROM REMINISCENCES)**

**V**ladimir Lenin is dead.

Even in the camp of his enemies there are some who honestly admit: in Lenin the world has lost the man "who embodied genius more strikingly than all the great men of his day".

Everything I wrote about him soon after his death was written in a spirit of depression, hurriedly and poorly. There were some things tact would not allow me to mention; and I hope this will be fully understood. This man was far-seeing and wise, and "in great wisdom there is also great sorrow".

He saw far ahead, and when thinking and speaking of people between 1919 and 1921 he often accurately foretold what they would be like within a few years. One was not always inclined to agree with his prophecies, for these were not infrequently discouraging, but it is an unfortunate fact that in due time many people came to fit his sceptical characterisations. My recollections of him, in addition to being poorly written, were without sequence and had some regrettable gaps. I should have begun with the London Congress, with the days when Vladimir Ilyich arose before me in the aura of the doubt and mistrust of some, of the outspoken hostility and even hatred of others.

I can still see the bare walls of the ridiculously shabby wooden church in the suburbs of London, the lancet windows, the small narrow hall much like the class-room of an impoverished school. It was only from the outside that the building resembled a church. The attributes of its use were conspicuously absent inside. The pulpit had even wandered from its customary place in the depths of the hall to the entrance, settling squarely between the two doors.

I had never met Lenin until that year,\* nor even read him as much as I should have done. I was greatly drawn

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\* This was a slip on Gorky's part which he pointed out himself at a later date. See page 23 about the writer's first meeting with Lenin.

to him, however, by the little I had read of his writings, and particularly by the delighted accounts of friends who were personally acquainted with him. When we were introduced he gripped my hand firmly, probed me with his searching eyes, and spoke up jestingly in the tone of an old friend:

"How good that you've come! You're fond of a fight, aren't you? Well, here there's going to be a big scrap."

I had not imagined him that way. I felt there was something missing in him. His *r*'s were guttural, and he stood with his thumbs shoved into the armholes of his waist-coat. He was too plain, there was nothing of "the leader" in him. I am a writer and my job is to take note of details. This has become a habit, sometimes even an annoying one.

When I was led up to G. V. Plekhanov, he stood eyeing me sternly with folded arms, with an air of boredom, like a weary teacher looking at a new pupil. All he said was the usual: "I'm an admirer of your talent". Apart from this he said nothing my memory could cling to. Neither he nor I had the slightest inclination for a "heart to heart" chat throughout the Congress.

But the bald, *r*-rolling, strong, thickset man who kept wiping his Socratic brow with one hand and jerking mine with the other began to talk at once, with beaming eyes, of the shortcomings of my book *Mother* which he had, it appeared, read in the manuscript borrowed from I. P. Ladvizhnikov. I explained that I had written that book in a hurry, but did not manage to tell him why, for he nodded understandingly and gave the reason himself: it was good I had been in a hurry, for that book was an urgent one; many of the workers had been caught up in the revolutionary movement unconsciously, spontaneously and would now read *Mother* with great benefit.

"A very timely book!" That was his only, but highly valuable compliment. After which he demanded in a

business-like tone whether *Mother* had been translated into any foreign languages and to what extent it had been crippled by the Russian and American censors. Told that its author was to be put on trial, he frowned wryly, threw back his head, closed his eyes, and emitted a burst of extraordinary laughter; this attracted the attention of the workers. . . .

Vladimir Ilyich hurriedly mounted the rostrum. His guttural *r* made him seem a poor speaker, but within a minute I was as completely engrossed as everyone else. I had never known one could talk of the most intricate political questions so simply. This speaker was no coiner of fine phrases, but presented each word on the palm of his hand, as it were, disclosing its precise meaning with astonishing ease. It would be hard to describe the extraordinary impression he created.

With his hand extended and slightly raised, he seemed to be weighing every word, sifting the phrases of his adversaries, putting forward weighty arguments against them, with proofs that it was the right and the duty of the working class to travel its own path, not in the rear or even abreast of the liberal bourgeoisie. It was all most extraordinary, pouring forth not so much from him as from the very mainspring of history. The integrity, polish, frankness, and force of his speech, everything about him as he stood on the rostrum blended into a work of art. Everything was in its place. There was nothing superfluous, no embellishments, or if there were, they could not be seen, for his figures of speech were as indispensable as a pair of eyes to a face, or five fingers to a hand.

He spoke less than those before him, but the impression he created was far greater. I was not the only one to feel this, for behind me I heard delighted whispers: "That's neatly put!"

And so it was, for his every argument revealed itself, unfolded itself by its own internal force.

The Mensheviks took no pains to disguise the fact that they found Lenin's speech obnoxious and his person even more so. The more pointedly he drove home the Party's need to rise to the heights of revolutionary theory in order to test all aspects of its practical work, the more often came the vicious interruptions:

"This Congress is no place for philosophy!"

"Don't try to teach us! We're not schoolboys!"

The worst of these hecklers was a big, bearded fellow with the face of a shopkeeper. Bouncing from his seat he kept stuttering:

"Cons-s-spirators... cons-s-spiracy i-is y-your g-game!  
B-blanquists!"

Rosa Luxemburg, on the other hand, nodded approval to Lenin's words. At one of the later sessions she aptly told the Mensheviks:

"You don't stand for Marxism, you sit on it, even wallow in it."\*

A hot, angry gust of irritation, irony, and hatred swept the hall. Hundreds of eyes were fixed upon Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, seeing him in different lights. The hostile sallies did not seem to perturb him, he spoke heatedly, but weightily and unruffled. What this outward serenity cost him I was to learn a few days later. It was both strange and painful to see that the hostility was prompted by the self-evident truth that the Party could clearly see the causes of its differences only from the heights of theory. I had the growing impression that every day of the Congress gave Vladimir Ilyich more and more strength, put him on his mettle, made him more certain; day by day his speeches grew firmer, and the entire Bolshevik section of

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\* These words were addressed to the Mensheviks by L. Tyszka, a Polish Social-Democrat.

the Congress was growing harder, more determined. In addition to his speeches, I was moved almost as much by Rosa Luxemburg's splendid hard-hitting speech against the Mensheviks.

In his leisure hours and even moments he was among the workers, questioning them about the pettiest details of their existence.

"What about the women? Isn't the housework too hard for them? Have they time to study or read?"

In Hyde Park several workers who had never seen Lenin before exchanged impressions they had formed of him at the Congress. Characteristically, one of them remarked:

"I don't know.... Perhaps the workers do have someone as clever as he in Europe—Bebel or someone like that. But I don't believe there is another whom I'd like as I liked this one, at first sight!"

To which another added, smiling:

"He's one of us!"

"So is Plekhanov!" someone objected.

"Plekhanov is the teacher, the boss, but Lenin is the comrade and leader!" came the answer.

"Plekhanov's frock-coat is a bit embarrassing," remarked a young chap slyly.

On another occasion Vladimir Ilyich was accosted by a worker Menshevik on his way to a restaurant. The young man asked him about something, so that he checked his stride and soon fell behind the others. Reaching the restaurant some five minutes later he commented scowling:

"Strange that such a naive chap should get so far as the Party Congress! He asked for the real reason of our disagreements. 'Well,' I said, 'your comrades want to sit in parliament, while we are sure the working class ought to prepare for battle.' I think he understood me...."

We were a small group dining as always in the same

cheap little restaurant. Vladimir Ilyich, I noticed, ate little: an omelette and a scrap of bacon washed down with a mug of thick, dark beer. He obviously did not worry about himself although his solicitude for the workers was amazing. M. F. Andreyeva was responsible for feeding them and he kept asking her:

"Think our comrades have had enough to eat? No one going hungry? Hm. . . . Perhaps you'd better make more sandwiches?"

Visiting me at my hotel he began prodding my bed with a worried air.

"What are you doing?"

"Are the sheets aired?"

What did he care what the sheets were like in London, I wondered, and he no doubt noticed my bewildered expression.

"You've got to look after your health."

In autumn 1918 I asked the Sormovo worker Dmitry Pavlov what, in his opinion, was Lenin's outstanding feature.

"Simplicity! He's as simple as the truth," he answered without hesitation, as though reiterating a long established fact.

A man's subordinates are usually his severest critics, but Lenin's chauffeur Ghil, a man who had seen a great deal in his time, had the following to say:

"Lenin—he's a special kind. There's no one else like him! I was driving through heavy traffic on Myasnitskaya, we were barely moving, and I kept blowing my horn afraid somebody would hit us. I was worried. He opened his door, got alongside of me on the running-board at the risk of being knocked off, and began to soothe me: 'There, there, Ghil! Don't let this worry you. Just keep going like everybody else! I'm an old driver, and am sure nobody would do such a thing, but he!"

It would be difficult to describe the naturalness and flexibility with which all his impressions converged in a single stream of thought.

Like the needle of a compass, his thoughts were always pointing to the class interests of the working people. One evening in London when we had nothing particular to do a group of us visited a music-hall, a popular little theatre frequented by plain people. Vladimir Ilyich laughed heartily at the clowns and the comic numbers, watched most of the others with indifference, but attentively eyed the scene of a couple of lumber-jacks from British Columbia felling a tree. The little stage had been set as a lumber camp, and two strapping fellows axed through a tree-trunk over a yard thick in a minute.

"That's for the benefit of the audience, of course. They couldn't really work that fast," commented Vladimir Ilyich. "It's obvious, though, that they use axes over there, reducing a lot of good wood to useless chips. That's the cultured British for you!"

He talked about the anarchy of production under the capitalist system, about the enormous percentage of raw materials wasted, and concluded with the regret that no one had yet thought of writing a book about it. The idea was not entirely clear to me, but before I could ask any questions he was off on an engaging account of "eccentricity" as a special form of theatrical art.

"It is a satirical or sceptical attitude to the conventional, a craving to turn it inside out, to twist it a little, and disclose what is illogical, in the customary. It's intricate—and interesting."

Discussing the Utopian novel with A. A. Bogdanov-Malinovsky in Capri two years later, he remarked:

"You ought to write a novel for the workers about how the capitalist predators have ravaged the Earth, squandering all its oil, iron, timber, and coal. That would be a useful book, Signor Machist!"

Taking leave of us in London, he assured me that he would go to Capri for a rest.

But before he was ready to go, I saw him again in Paris in a little student's flat of two rooms: it was a student's flat only in size, however, not for its cleanliness and faultless order. Having served tea, Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya went off somewhere, and the two of us remained alone. The *Znaniye* Publishers was then folding up and I had come to talk to Vladimir Ilyich about the organisation of a new publishing house that would possibly unite all our literary men. I proposed that Vladimir Ilyich, V. V. Vorovsky, and someone else be the editors abroad, and that V. A. Desnitsky-Stroyev represent them in Russia.

I felt it was necessary to write a number of books on the history of Western and Russian literature, books on the history of culture, offering workers extensive factual material for propaganda and self-education.

Vladimir Ilyich quashed that plan, however, pointing to the censorship and the difficulty of organising people; most of them were engaged in practical Party work, and had no time to write. The main and best reason he adduced, I thought, was approximately the following. This was no time for bulky books; these were devoured by the intelligentsia who were clearly retreating from socialism to liberalism and we could not move them from their chosen path. What we needed was a newspaper, pamphlets. It would be good to resume publication of the *Znaniye* series,\* but that was impossible in Russia because of the censorship, and impossible here because of transportation difficulties. We had to get scores and hundreds of thousands of leaflets to the people, but such quantities could not be taken into the country illegally. We would have to postpone the organisation of a publishing house until better times.

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\* At the end of 1905, Maxim Gorky, acting in conformity with a proposal of the Bolshevik Central Committee, organised a Party publications section of the "Popular Library" series issued by *Znaniye* Publishers.

With his astonishing vitality and lucidity he began to talk of the Duma, of the Cadets who were "ashamed" of being "Octobrists",\* noting that the "only path before them led to the right." He then adduced a number of proofs that war was near, and "probably not just one war, but a whole series of them." This forecast was soon to be confirmed in the Balkans.

He stood in his usual pose, his thumbs thrust into the armholes of his waistcoat; then he began slowly pacing to and fro in that tiny room, his eyes gleaming through narrowed eyelids.

"War is coming. That's inevitable. The capitalist world has reached the state of putrid ferment, people have begun to swallow the poison of chauvinism and nationalism. I think we shall yet witness an all-European war. The proletariat? I hardly think the proletariat will find the strength to prevent a blood-bath. How could it be done? By a general strike throughout Europe? The workers are not organised well enough for that, nor class-conscious enough. Such a strike would be the beginning of civil war, and we, as realistic politicians, can't bank on such a thing."

Pausing to pat the floor pensively with the sole of his shoe, he added moodily:

"The proletariat will suffer terribly, of course, that is its fate for the time being. But its enemies will enfeeble one another; that too is inevitable."

He came up to me.

"Just think of it!" he spoke with an air of surprise, forcefully, but quietly. "Think of what the satiated are driving the hungry to slaughter one another for? Can you think of a crime more idiotic, more revolting? The workers

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\* The Cadets (Constitutional-Democrats) were a bourgeois liberal-monarchist party that wanted to establish a constitutional monarchy in Russia.

The Octobrists were a counter-revolutionary party whose membership consisted of big bourgeois industrialists and landowners; they gave full support to the tsarist government.

will pay a terrible price for this, but will win out in the end; that is the will of history."

Though he frequently spoke of history I never heard him say anything indicating that he bowed to its will and power as to a fetish.

His words had upset him. Sitting down at the table he wiped his forehead, took a sip of his cold tea and suddenly asked:

"What was that trouble you were in in America? I read about it in the newspapers, but how did it happen?"

I gave him a brief account of my adventure.

I have never met anyone who could laugh so infectious-ly as Vladimir Ilyich. It was even strange that this grim realist who so poignantly saw and felt the inevitability of great social tragedies, the man who was unbending and implacable in his hatred for the capitalist world, could laugh so naively, could laugh to tears, barely able to catch his breath. What a strong, sound spirit was needed to laugh like that!

"You're a humorist, aren't you!" he gasped through his laughter. "That's something I'd never have expected. It's awfully funny...."

Wiping his eyes, he smiled gently and remarked in a serious vein:

"It's good you can see the funny side of your set-backs. A sense of humour is a splendid healthy quality. I'm sensitive to humour, though I've no talent for it myself. There's probably as much of it in life as sadness, no less, I'm sure."

I was to call on him again two days later, but the weather deteriorated and I had a hemoptysis attack that compelled me to leave town on the next day.

After Paris we met again in Capri, and I had the queer impression that there were two of Lenin on the island, two in sharply different frames of mind.

The Vladimir Ilyich whom I met on the quayside at once determinedly told me:

"I know, Alexei Maximovich, that you're hoping to reconcile me with the Machists, though my letter has warned you that such a thing is impossible. See that you don't try!"

On our way to my flat and after we arrived I kept trying to explain that he was not altogether right, that I had no intention of reconciling philosophical differences which, by the way, I did not understand any too well. Apart from this I had been suspicious of all philosophy from my youth, since it contradicted my "subjective" experience: the world was just beginning, "coming into shape" for me, and philosophy kept cuffing me with its inept and untimely questions:

"Where are you going? What for? Why, do you think?"

Some philosophers indeed curtly commanded:

"Halt!"

In addition, I was already aware that, like a woman, philosophy could be very plain, even ugly, but so cunningly and convincingly arrayed that it could pass for a beauty. This made Vladimir Ilyich laugh.

"That's humour," he said. "But the world 'just beginning, coming into shape'-that's good! Give it some serious thought and starting from there you'll get where you should have got to long ago."

I then remarked that A. A. Bogdanov, A. V. Lunacharsky, and V. A. Bazarov were big men in my eyes, men of superb, all-round education. I had not met their equals in the Party.

"Assuming that's true, what do you deduce?"

"In the final analysis I regard them as men with a common aim, and a common aim, wholeheartedly accepted, ought to eliminate philosophical contradictions. . . ."

"Which means you're still hoping for reconciliation? That's futile!" he assured. "Drive that hope away as far as you can; that's my friendly advice! Plekhanov, too, is

a man with the same aim, according to you, but—and let this remain between us—I think he is pursuing an altogether different aim, even if he is a materialist and not a metaphysician."

Our talk ended there. It is hardly necessary to add that I have not set it down word for word, not literally, but I can vouch for the sense of it.

I now saw a Vladimir Ilyich Lenin who was firmer, more unbending than he had been at the London Congress. But there he had been worried; there had been moments when one could plainly perceive that the split in the Party was affecting him deeply.

Here he was serene, frosty and mocking, veering severely away from all talk of a philosophical nature, watchful and wary. A. A. Bogdanov, a very likable man, gentle and very fond of Lenin, though a little self-opinionated, had to listen to some pointed, cutting remarks:

"Schopenhauer said: 'He who thinks clearly expounds things clearly.' That's the best thing he ever said, I think. But you, Comrade Bogdanov, expound things unclearly. Tell me, in two or three phrases, what your "substitution" offers the working class and why Machism is more revolutionary than Marxism?"

Bogdanov tried to explain, but was really too wordy and hazy.

"Drop it!" advised Vladimir Ilyich. "Someone, I think it was Jaurés, once said: 'I'd rather tell the truth than be a minister'; I would have added: 'or a Machist.'"

After which he played an impassioned game of chess with Bogdanov and grew angry when he lost, even sulking rather childishly. This was extraordinary: like his surprising laughter, his childish sulking could not impair the monolithic wholeness of his character.

But there was another Lenin, too, on Capri—the splendid comrade, the cheerful person with a live unflagging interest

in everything in the world, with an astonishingly kindly approach to people.

When everybody had gone off for a walk late one evening, he had a chat with M. F. Andreyeva and me. His tone was sorrowful, deeply regretful.

"They are intelligent, talented people who have done a great deal for the Party, who could do ten times more, but they won't go with us! They can't. Scores and hundreds like them are broken and crippled by this criminal system."

On another occasion he remarked:

"Lunacharsky will return to the Party; he's less of an individualist than those two. He is a man of rare gifts. I 'have a weakness' for him—what stupid words, damn it! 'A weakness for someone!' I like him, you know, he is an excellent comrade! There is a certain French brilliance in him. His frivolity is also French, the frivolity of his aestheticism."

He made close enquiries about the lives of the Capri fishermen, he wanted to know what they earned, to what extent they were influenced by the priests; he asked about the schools they sent their children to. I was amazed at the range of his interests. Told that one of the priests was the son of a poor peasant, he immediately wanted to know: how often the peasants sent their children to the religious schools, and whether they returned to serve as priests in their own villages?

"Don't you see? If this is not mere chance, it must be Vatican policy. . . . A very cunning policy!"

I cannot imagine another man who towered so high over everyone else, but was able to resist the temptations of ambition and retain a vital interest in the "common people".

He had a magnetic quality that won the hearts and sympathies of the working people. He could not speak Italian, but the fishermen of Capri who had seen Chaliapin and quite a few other prominent Russians intuitively assigned him a special place. There was great charm in his

laughter—the hearty laughter of a man who, able though he was to gauge the clumsiness of human stupidity and the cunning capers of the intellect, could take pleasure in the child-like simplicity of the “common people”.

“Only an honest man can laugh like that,” commented the old fisherman Giovanni Spadaro.

Rocking in his boat on waves as blue and transparent as the sky, Lenin tried to learn to catch fish “on the finger”, i.e., with a line, but no rod. The fishermen had told him to snatch in the line the instant his finger felt the slightest vibration.

“Così: drin-drin. Capisci?” they said.

At that moment he hooked a fish, and hauled it in, crying out with the delight of a child and the excitement of a hunter: “Aha! Drin-drin!”

The fishermen shouted with laughter, like children too, and nicknamed him Signor Drin-Drin.

Long after Lenin had left, they still kept asking:

“How is Signor Drin-Drin? Are you sure the tsar won’t catch him?”

In the hungry harrowing year of 1919 Lenin was ashamed to eat the food sent him by his comrades and by soldiers and peasants in the provinces. When parcels were brought to his uncomfortable flat he would frown, grow confused, and hurry to distribute the flour, sugar and butter among the sick or those of his comrades who were weak from undernourishment. Inviting me to dinner, he remarked:

“I can treat you to some smoked fish sent from Astrakhan.”

Wrinkling his Socratic brow, with a sharp slanting glance, he added:

“They keep sending stuff as if I were their master! But how ward this off? To refuse to accept it means hurting someone. And everybody’s hungry all around.”

Undemanding, a stranger to drinking or smoking, busy

at his difficult and complicated work from morning till night, and utterly unable to see to his own needs, he nevertheless kept a sharp eye on the lives of his comrades. One day he sat writing something at his desk.

"Hullo, how are you?" he asked, his pen never leaving the sheet of paper. "I'll be through in a minute. There's a comrade in the provinces who is fed up, apparently tired. We've got to cheer him up. A man's mood is an important thing!"

Once when I dropped in on him in Moscow he asked: "Have you had dinner?"

"Yes."

"You're not making that up?"

"I've got witnesses—I had dinner in the Kremlin dining-room."

"I've heard the cooking is rotten there."

"Not rotten, but it could be better."

Whereupon he began to question me narrowly: why was the food bad? How could it be improved?

"What's the matter with them?" he fumed. "Couldn't they find a decent cook? People are working themselves to the bone; they've got to be fed good things, to make them eat more. I know that there's not enough and the stuff is poor, that's why they need a capable cook." He then cited some hygienist or other on the importance of garnishing food to the processes of digestion and nourishment.

"How do you manage to give any thought to such things?" I asked.

"To rational diets?" he countered, his tone indicating that my question was inept.

An old acquaintance of mine, P. A. Skorokhodov, a man from Sormovo like me, was a gentle soul and once complained of his hard work with the Cheka.\* To which I observed:

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\* All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Suppression of Counter Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation.

"That's not the job for you, I think. You're not cut out for it."

"Quite right!" he agreed sadly. "I'm not cut out for it at all." But reflecting a little, he went on: "Still, when I remember that Ilyich, too, probably has very often to suppress his feelings, I'm ashamed of my weakness."

I have known and still know quite a few workers who have had to grit their teeth and "suppress their feelings"—actually strain their organic "social idealism"—for the triumph of the cause they are serving.

Did Lenin ever have to "suppress his feelings"?

He was concerned with himself too little to talk to anyone about such things and no one was better able to keep secret the storms in his heart. Only once, while caressing someone's children in Gorki, he remarked:

"They will live better than we; many of the things we've had to live through will be unknown to them. Their lives will not be so harsh."

But looking out at the hills where a village nestled, he added pensively:

"I don't envy them, for all that. Our generation has succeeded in doing a job of astounding historical importance. The conditions we have to endure and our harshness will be understood and justified. It will all be understood, all of it!"

He patted children cautiously, with a fleeting, solicitous touch.

Dropping in on him one day, I saw a volume of *War and Peace* on his desk.

"That's right. Tolstoi! I meant to read the scene of the hunt, but then remembered I had to write to a comrade. I have no time at all to read. It was only last night that I read your little book on Tolstoi."

Smiling with narrowed eyes he stretched luxuriously in his armchair and went on in a lowered tone:

Yet time and again, when he was discussing the people whom he had buffeted about and ridiculed the day before, I plainly heard a note of sincere astonishment over their talent and moral stability, of respect for their hard persistent work under the hellish conditions of 1918-21, when they laboured surrounded by the spies of all countries and all political parties, amidst conspiracies that ripened like rotting sores on the body of the country exhausted by war. They had worked without rest, had eaten little and poor food, and had lived in a state of constant anxiety.

Lenin himself did not seem to feel the burden of those conditions, the anxieties of a life torn to its foundations by the sanguinary storm of civil strife. Only once, while talking to M. F. Andreyeva, did anything like complaint burst from him:

"But what can we do, my dear Maria Fyodorovna? We've got to keep fighting. That's imperative! You find things hard? Of course! Do you think I don't find things hard, sometimes? Very hard, I can tell you! But look at Dzerzhinsky. See what he looks like! But what can you do? Never mind how hard things are, as long as we win out!"

As for myself, I heard him complain only once:

"What a pity," he said, "that Martov is not with us! What a wonderful comrade he is, what a good man!"

I remember how long and heartily he laughed when he read somewhere that Martov had said: "There are only two Communists in Russia, Lenin and Kollontai."

Recovering from his laughter he added with a sigh:

"How clever he is! Ah...."

After seeing an economic executive out of his study, he said with the same respect and wonder:

"Have you known him long? He could head a cabinet in any European country."

Rubbing his hands, he added:

"Europe is poorer in talent than we."

I suggested that he visit the chief artillery headquarters with me to look at the invention of one of the Bolsheviks, a former artilleryman. It was a device to correct anti-aircraft fire.

"What do I know of such things?" he said, but went with me just the same. Surrounding the device on a table in a darkish room sat seven grim generals, all of them grey, moustached, and erudite. Lenin's civilian figure seemed lost, imperceptible among them. The inventor proceeded to explain the construction of his device. Listening approvingly for a minute or two, Lenin began to question the man as easily as if he were putting him through an examination on political problems:

"How does the aiming mechanism manage a double task? Couldn't the angle of the gun barrels be synchronised automatically to the findings of the mechanism?"

He also asked about the range and some other things, receiving animated answers from the inventor and the generals. On the next day the inventor related:

"I had told my generals that you intended to come with a comrade, but did not tell them who that comrade was. They did not recognise Ilyich and probably could not imagine he would turn up so quietly, without ostentation and without a guard. 'Is he a technician, a professor?' they asked. 'Lenin!' They were speechless. 'He didn't look like him,' they said. 'And how did he happen to know our particular field so well? He asked questions like a man technically well informed.' They were mystified. I don't think they really believed he was Lenin."

On his way back from the artillery headquarters, Lenin kept laughing, saying of the inventor:

"How wrong one can be in sizing up a man! I knew he was a good old comrade, but hardly bright enough to snatch a star from the sky. And that's exactly what he's turned out to be good for. That's excellent! Did you see those generals bristle when I expressed doubts about the

practical value of the device? I did it on purpose—to see what they really thought of that clever device of his."

He laughed again, and asked:

"You say he has another invention? Why isn't something done about it? He ought to be busy with nothing else. Ah, if only we could give all those technicians ideal working conditions! Russia would be the most advanced country in the world in twenty-five years!"

I often heard him praise people. He was able to talk in this vein even about those whom it was said he did not like, paying due tribute to their energy.

His attitude to me was that of a strict mentor and kind "solicitous friend."

"You're a curious person," he jested one day. "You seem to be a good realist in literature, but a romanticist where people are concerned. You think everybody is a victim of history, don't you? We know history and say to the victims: 'overthrow the altars, shatter the temples, and drive the gods away!' Yet you would like to convince me that the militant party of the working class is obliged to make the intellectuals comfortable, first and foremost."

I may be mistaken, but I felt that Vladimir Ilyich liked discussing things with me.

He urged nearly always: "Phone me whenever you're around, and we'll get together."

On another occasion he remarked:

"Discussing things with you is always engaging; you've got a wider and greater range of impressions."

He asked me about the sentiments of the intellectuals with special stress on the scientists; A. B. Khalatov and I at that time were working with the committee for the improvement of conditions for the scientists. Vladimir Ilyich was also interested in proletarian literature.

"Do you anticipate anything from it?"

I said I expected a great deal, but felt it was essential to organise a literary college with branches of philology, the foreign languages of East and West, folk-lore, the history of world literature, and a separate department for the history of Russian literature.

"Hm," he reflected, squinting and smiling. "That's very broad and dazzling! I don't mind it being broad, but it's dazzling, too, isn't it! We haven't any professors of our own in this sphere. As for the bourgeois professors, you can imagine what sort of history they'll give us. . . . No, that's more than we can carry now. . . . We'll have to wait some three, perhaps five years."

He went on plaintively:

"I've no time at all to read! . . . Don't you find that an awful lot of verses are being written? There are whole pages of them in the magazines, and new collections keep appearing nearly every day."

I said that youth's yearning for song was natural in such days, and that mediocre verses, to my mind, were easier to write than good prose. Verses took less time to write, I observed, and in addition we had many good teachers of prosody.

"That verses are easier than prose is something I won't believe. I can't imagine such a thing. I couldn't write two lines of poetry, no matter what you did to me," he said frowning. "The whole of the old revolutionary literature, as much of it as we have and as there is in Europe, must be made available to the masses."

He was a Russian who had lived away from Russia for a long time and was examining his country attentively—finding it had seemed more vivid, more colourful from afar. He correctly appraised its potential force—the exceptional talent of the people, as yet feebly expressed, unawakened by history, still lame and dreary; but there was talent

everywhere, for all that, golden stars spangling the sombre background of fantastic Russian life.

Vladimir Lenin, a real man of this world, has passed away. His death is a painful blow to all who knew him, a very painful blow!

But the black border of death shall but emphasise his importance in the eyes of all the world—the importance of the leader of the working people of the world.

If the clouds of hatred for him, the clouds of lies and slander woven round him were even denser, neither they nor any other forces could dim the torch he has raised in the stifling darkness of the world gone mad.

Never has there been a man who more than he deserves to be remembered by the whole world.

Vladimir Lenin is dead. But the heirs of his mind and will are living. They are alive and working more successfully than anyone on Earth ever worked before.



Lenin and Bonch-Bruyevich in the  
Kremlin grounds. Moscow, Oc-  
tober 1918





# **V. BONCH-BRUYEVICH**

V. D. Bonch-Bruyevich, one of the oldest members of the Communist Party and veteran of the February and October revolutions of 1917, knew Lenin very well, having worked with him for many years. He was Administrative Manager at the Council of People's Commissars from the first days of October until 1920. Later, he was the editor-in-chief of the *Zhizn i Znaniye* (Life and Knowledge) Publishing House, and the organiser and director of the State Literary Museum. He wrote many works on the history of the revolutionary movement in Russia, on literature and ethnography.

**HOW VLADIMIR  
ILYICH  
WROTE  
THE DECREE  
ON LAND**

**W**hen the Winter Palace had been taken by the revolutionary Bolshevik forces and Vladimir Ilyich, who had been deeply troubled by the slowness of our military leaders, at last breathed freely, he at once discarded his simple disguise and, surrounded by his oldest political friends, made his appearance at the session of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies where the culmination of the events was awaited.

It was not thunder, but something more, something stupendous—a tornado of emotion that swept the hall when Vladimir Ilyich appeared on the platform. The session was opened with more greetings, more exclamations, more rejoicing.... That historic session was indeed a fiery, a stormy one.

With the work of the session done, we made for my flat late that night. We had a snack, and I did my best to make Vladimir Ilyich comfortable after supper. He was excited, but obviously very tired. I could hardly persuade him to take my bed in a small room where there was a desk, paper, ink, and a shelf of books.

I retired to the couch in the next room, determined not to fall asleep until I was sure Vladimir Ilyich was sleeping. For greater safety I locked the outside door, fastening the chains, hooks and bolts, besides loading our revolvers, for somebody might try to break in, to arrest, or kill Vladimir Ilyich. This was the first night of the revolution, and anything might happen! To be on the safe side, too, I at once jotted down on a sheet of paper all the telephone numbers of comrades, the telephones of Smolny, the district workers' committees and trade unions, for fear of forgetting them in a flurry.

Vladimir Ilyich had already switched off the light in his room, and I listened, wondering if he was sleeping. There was not a sound and I was just dozing off; in another moment I should have been asleep, when the light suddenly flashed on in Vladimir Ilyich's room. I heard him rise

almost soundlessly and open the door a trifle to make sure I was sleeping (which I was not). He tip-toed to the desk, sat down, opened the ink-well and set to work on some papers he had spread out.

He kept writing, crossing out what he had written, reading, making notes, writing again, and then, at last, apparently rewrote the whole thing in a fair copy. The dawn of late autumn in Petrograd was turning the sky grey when he turned off the light, got into bed and fell asleep.

When it was time to rise, I warned everybody in the flat to be as quiet as they could, since Vladimir Ilyich had been working all night and was doubtlessly very tired. But suddenly he was among us, popping out of his room fully dressed, fresh, energetic, cheerful, and joking.

"Congratulations on this first day of the socialist revolution!" he exclaimed greeting everyone. There was not a trace of weariness in his face. One might have thought he had slept splendidly. Actually, he had snatched only two or three hours, no more, after a dreadful twenty-hour grind. When we were gathered for breakfast and were joined by Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya who had also spent the night at our house, Vladimir Ilyich took some neatly written pages from his pocket and proceeded to read us his famous Decree on Land.

"If only we can proclaim this, publish and spread it widely! Let them try to take it back! Not a chance; no authority will ever be able to wrest that decree from the peasants and return the land to the landowners. This is the most important gain of our October Revolution. The agrarian revolution will be completed and consolidated today."

When someone remarked that there would be plenty of disorder and struggle in the countryside yet, he promptly dismissed the idea as of no importance, saying that everything would fall into place, if only the fundamentals were understood and assimilated. He went on to explain that

the decree would be particularly acceptable to the peasants, since he had based it on the demands expressed in all the peasants' mandates to their deputies and reflected in the general mandates to the Congress of Soviets.

"But they were all Socialist-Revolutionaries," objected someone. "People will say we're borrowing from them."

Vladimir Ilyich smiled:

"Let them say so. The peasants will clearly understand that we always support their just demands. We've got to come close up to the peasants, to their lives, and their wants. If some fools choose to laugh, then let them. We never intended to cede the Socialist-Revolutionaries a monopoly over the peasants. We are the main government Party, and the peasant question is second in importance only to that of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

The Decree on Land was to be proclaimed at the Congress that very evening; and it was decided to have it retyped at once to be handed on for publication in the newspaper tomorrow. It was then that Vladimir Ilyich struck on the idea of a decree requiring all newspapers to carry the proclamations of the government.

It was also decided to publish the Decree as a separate booklet in no less than 50 thousand copies to be distributed firstly among soldiers returning to their villages, since it would thus the sooner gain wide distribution among the masses. This, too, was brilliantly accomplished in the next few days.

Soon we set off for Smolny on foot, but then got on a tram-car. Vladimir Ilyich was beaming, watching the exemplary order in the streets. He was impatient for the evening to come. When the Second All-Russia Congress had adopted the Decree on Peace, he read out the Decree on Land, which was enthusiastically and unanimously approved.

No sooner had the Decree been adopted than I sent copies of it to all the Petrograd editorial offices by special

messengers, and to other cities by mail and telegraph. Our newspapers prepared it for print well ahead of time. In the morning it was read by hundreds of thousands and millions, and was warmly received by all the working people. The bourgeoisie hissed and barked at it in their newspapers, but who cared to listen to them, then?

Vladimir Ilyich exulted:

"This alone," he said, "will leave a mark on our history for many years to come."

The epoch of exceedingly rich revolutionary creativity had begun very successfully. Vladimir Ilyich kept asking about the Decree for a long time, wanting to know how many copies had been distributed among the soldiers and peasants, apart from the newspapers. It was reprinted in booklet form many times and free copies were generously distributed not only to the gubernia and uyezd towns, but to all the volosts of Russia.

The Decree on Land came to be known everywhere. Probably no other law has ever been published here as widely as this law on land, one of the basic laws of our new socialist legislation to which Vladimir Ilyich gave so much of his strength and energy, and to which he attributed enormous importance.



**THE ARMS  
OF THE  
SOVIET  
STATE**

**T**he design of the arms of our Soviet country was a matter of great importance, since such an emblem would have to have an inner meaning differing completely from anything expressed in the emblems of the capitalist countries.

The painting of an emblem in water colours was received at the office of the Council of People's Commissars. It was as round as the present arms and had the same symbols, except for a long unsheathed sword which almost covered it. The hilt rested on the band holding together the sheaves at the bottom, with the narrowing blade emerging among the sunrays that formed the upper part of the general pattern.

Vladimir Ilyich was in his study, talking to Y. M. Sverdlov, F. E. Dzerzhinsky, and several other comrades when the drawing was laid before him.

"What's this, a coat of arms?... That's interesting!" He bent over his desk, studying the thing. We who stood around him regarded the sketch with interest; it had been submitted by an artist from the studio of the *Goznak* printing works.

The arms seemed good on the whole. The rays of a rising sun framed in ears of wheat between which one could plainly see a hammer and sickle shone against a red background. The design was dominated, as though a warning to all, by the sharp blade running through it from bottom to top.

"That's interesting!" said Vladimir Ilyich. "The idea is there, but what's the sword for?" He looked up at us.

"We're struggling, fighting, and will continue to fight until we have consolidated the dictatorship of the proletariat and have driven the whiteguards and interventionists from our country, but that does not mean that war, the military, and military violence will ever predominate among us. We need no conquests. The policy of conquest is altogether alien to us; we're not attacking, but repulsing

our enemies at home and abroad; our war is a defensive war, and the sword is no emblem of ours. We must hold it firmly in our hands to defend our proletarian state as long as we have enemies, as long as they keep attacking, as long as they keep menacing us, but this does not imply it will always be that way. . . .

"Socialism will triumph in all countries—that's unquestionable. The brotherhood of the nations will be proclaimed and implemented throughout the world, and we don't need that sword, it is not our emblem. . ." repeated Vladimir Ilyich.

"We've got to remove the sword from the emblem of our Socialist State," he went on. Reaching for a sharp pencil, he struck out the sword with a proof-reader's symbol which he repeated on the margin to the right of the emblem.

"The emblem is good, otherwise. Let's approve the draft, look at it again and discuss it in the Council of People's Commissars. But all this has got to be done quickly. . . ."

With which he signed the drawing.

I returned the draft to the artist who was present, and asked him to rework the emblem.

When the drawing was returned to us a second time—without the sword—we decided to show it to the sculptor Andreyev. He found it necessary to introduce some technical corrections. He redrew the emblem, thickened the sheaves, intensified the sunrays and brought the whole thing out in greater relief, making it more expressive.

The arms of the R.S.F.S.R. were approved at the beginning of 1918.

Like the Red Star, this emblem of the Soviet Republic has come to be a symbol for all the proletarians, for all the working people of the world.



The Arms of the Soviet State



Lenin, Krupskaya and Maria Ulyanova at a parade of workers undergoing general military training, on Red Square. Moscow, May 25, 1919





# **ALEXANDER BEK**

The Soviet novelist and State Prize winner, Alexander Bek, is known for his novel **The Life of Berezhkov**, for four stories linked together in his **Volokolamsk Highway**, many short stories and essays. Bek is able to infuse artistic life in the documentary facts of history. His story "Lenin's Letter" was first published in a collection of the best stories of 1956

# **LENIN'S LETTER**

**D**irectly after the rout of Wrangel at the end of 1920 Klyavin, a member of the Revolutionary Military Council of one of the armies of the Southern Front, and several other Party organisers in the forces, were transferred by the Central Committee to the work of restoring industry. In the whole of the vast country suffering from the attrition of four years of imperialist war and three years of civil war only one blast-furnace—the Staro-Petrovsk No. 6—was still in operation. It was to this place, to the Staro-Petrovsk Works, which consisted of several mines and an iron foundry, that Klyavin was assigned as director.

The train carrying the staff and the political department reached its destination on a winter night. A small shunting locomotive hauled the train onto the factory line. From the platform at the end of his coach, Klyavin stared out at the darkness through which the feeble glow of a solitary blast-furnace was scarcely visible; he could barely discern the black tracery of steel over the tops of the furnaces, the silent silhouettes of the hot-blast stoves resembling monstrous artillery shells set on end. The grey concrete buildings stared back at him dead-eyed, most of their windows smashed.

Klyavin who had never worked at a factory—he had been a mathematics teacher before the Revolution—was faced with the job of breathing life into those immobile giants.

Setting to work he resorted to the old, well-tried methods of military pressure, writing ominous orders, and so on. But results there were none. Whereupon he launched a series of daily *subbotniks*,\* leading the columns of labour volunteers himself. The spirit of the workers had been

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\* *Subbotnik*—a form of voluntary, spare-time work for the benefit of the socialist state. The first *subbotnik* was held in Moscow on May 10, 1919, which was a Saturday (*Subбота* in Russian).

fanned high enough by the army's political organisers and the Communists at the plant to rout any adversary. With the instinct of a soldier Klyavin realised this very well. The dead colossus, it seemed, had been stirred at last. Within a few weeks, however, the production curve went down and down, for the attack had spent itself before the miracle could be achieved. The columns grew thinner day by day, though Klyavin stuck to his guns. He knew he was beaten, but kept marching at the head of his handful of soldiers and workers, *subbotnik* after *subbotnik*.

He had practically stopped sleeping by now, racking his brains for the key to his problem. Elected a delegate to the Tenth Congress of the Party with voice but no vote, he would not, and indeed could not, show himself in Moscow until he had solved his problem.

A solution, however, was eventually found.

On a May evening in 1921 he sat waiting in Lenin's ante-room. He was alone, for the secretary had gone off to announce him. His young face was pale and strained, the smile hovering at his lips kept fading whenever he heard the slightest noise. At the relatively unknown Staro-Petrovsk, an inconspicuous sector, he, Klyavin, had proved the theorems of socialism in practice. The diagrams and reports lay safely in his bag. He would trot them all out now and spread them before Lenin.

When the door opened and the secretary returned with a stack of papers, he lunged from his seat, bending tensely forward.

"You may go in, comrade," she said. "But don't take up too much of Vladimir Ilyich's time."

Lenin rose from his small desk, smiling.

"You've lost weight, lost weight!... How are you, Comrade Klyavin!?"

Klyavin's throat and lips grew dry. How could Lenin have remembered him? Two years ago, in 1919, he had taken part in several sittings of the Council of People's Commissars, and talked to Lenin once. And Lenin still remembered him?! Could those slightly slurred words be addressed to him, Klyavin? He crossed the room, seeing nothing but the smiling face, the affectionately narrowed eyes, the great shining brow with its protuberances. Swallowing hard, he was hardly able to say:

"How do you do, Vladimir Ilyich!"

"Sit down. Let's have your report. What's new in the Donets Basin?"

All the words Klyavin had prepared fell into disarray. He gripped his brief-case with both hands: it was all there, he would get it out right away. . . .

But the nasty little lock would not open! Tormented by the prolonged silence and his extraordinary clumsiness, he tore at the thing with all his might—and suddenly, to his horror—the exploding brief-case ejected a cake of soap and a bast bathing brush, the kind you could find in any bath-house. Both objects slid onto Lenin's papers on the desk.

Lenin laughed heartily. Flushing to his hair roots, Klyavin kept staring at his mutilated brief-case. He could not bring himself to look up at Lenin. That must have been Galka's work, damn her! She had been prattling about him going to a bath-house and had shoved that bathing brush into his bag, after all!

"Going to have a bath to celebrate your arrival?"

"Why, yes."

"A steam bath? But are the steam rooms working at the Moscow bath-houses?"

"They are."

"You're not fibbing?"

Pushing his wicker chair aside, Lenin, his jacket unbuttoned, strode past his bookcases.

"That's splendid! So one can have a steam bath even with the Bolsheviks in power, eh?"

He rubbed his hands, stiffened his back and moaned, as though he had just doused himself with a basin of hot water. His eyes shining, he laughed again, his reddish moustache never quite covering his thick lips, parted in a smile.

It was not the calculating pleasure of a boss that could be heard in that laughter. It was plain, unselfish joy. The feeling that had gripped him was so human, so vivid that Klyavin forgot all about his bathing brush. His tension was gone. He felt easy, free in Lenin's presence now.

But Lenin's expression changed.

"We're a fine lot! Writing about everything under the sun in the newspapers, the devil take it, composing all sorts of flimsy theses, but no one has been found smart enough to write something about the baths."

He stuffed his hands angrily into his pockets, and there were furrows between his brows.

"I suppose I shall never manage to get a good steaming in a Moscow bath-house. I've got a most unpleasant job...."

Lenin sighed, indicating the large pad of papers before him, each bearing the seal of the "Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars." Klyavin caught the twinkle in his eye.

Realising that he should not dally, that every minute of Lenin's working time was precious, he began his account.

Four stearin candles stood on Vladimir Ilyich's desk. Their black, burnt wicks showed that the country's general economic ruin had touched this place as well, that here, too, the lights went out when the steam turbines failed in the Moscow Power Station. Lenin sat down, then rose again and moved the candles so that he could see Klyavin's face. Surreptitiously, he shoved the bathing brush out of sight among the folders and books. This done, he leaned forward, his chest against the desk, to listen as closely as he could.

His left eye grew narrower, the brow curving sharply. His features expressed concentrated attention, with the sly hint of a smile hovering on his lips. Sometimes his eyes fixed upon Klyavin as though they would drill him through.

No longer inhibited, feeling no barrier between himself and Lenin, Klyavin spoke rapidly and fervently of his unsuccessful attempts, of his ideas and doubts.

"It seemed axiomatic, Vladimir Ilyich, that we should think up something new, something utterly unlike capitalist methods of management. But suddenly I was struck with the thought: what for? Why do that? Why not resort to piece-work, elementary piece-work of the kind even Marx wrote about, and harness it to our needs?"

"As simple as that? Well?"

"The works have been feeding eighteen thousand, applying the equalitarian system. But just a moment, thought I, can't the bread be distributed differently? Couldn't we pay bread for work, for productivity, and not for belonging to the proletarian class? The trade unionists thought this was heresy, and I had to put up a fight. Since March I have been able to introduce the bread piece-rate system for all that, and here are the results, Vladimir Ilyich."

Klyavin drew a diagram from his brief-case and spread it on the desk. The red line, at first undulating somewhere at the bottom, began rapidly to rise, cutting across the horizontal black line indicating the average productivity of the miner in 1913, and then rising over it like a long tongue.

Lenin's eyes quickly followed the lines, but paused on the figures and marginal notes.

"But how do you pay them? For what productivity would a miner receive, say, three pounds of bread? Have you fixed the job rates?"

"I held eleven rate-setting conferences. The old workers and I sat discussing things several days. . . ."

"Is that so? Well. . . ."

Lenin grew more and more animated, asking how the rate-setting conferences were organised, what arguments, incidents and suggestions there had been. Klyavin was elated, for he saw that his information was striking home, that the achievements of Staro-Petrovsk interested Vladimir Ilyich in all details. He spoke enthusiastically, compelled in spite of himself to mention his own activities, his own role, the things he had done, and the things that had troubled him. Lenin gently steered him along another channel, striving to get to the facts characterising the lives of the people at the works.

"Is the system simple enough? Is it understandable to every worker? You haven't complicated things, or confused them? Have there been any complaints?"

Klyavin brought out his productivity registration book, the pay cards of the workers, the bread coupons and, rising in his seat, showed them to Lenin. Examining all this, Lenin put fresh questions. Piece-work rates were a discovery for the Republic of Soviets in May 1921, after three years of War Communism.

Having scanned the documents, Lenin leaned back.

"That's something we ought to have discussed at the trade union congress!" he exclaimed. "A lot of people have got together, chattering for all of six days without finding one good example out of hundreds that could be studied and emulated! Good for the Staro-Petrovsk workers! Good for them, I say!"

He looked over his desk, snapping his fingers, his eyes searching for something. Lifting the diagram, he extracted the pad with the heading of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars on it, reached for his pen and began to write rapidly, in a large swinging hand, never pausing for a correction.

Klyavin could not help noticing the address. Lenin's lines were addressed to the workers of the Staro-Petrovsk Works.

Having signed and blotted the document, he tore the page from the pad and handed it to Klyavin.

"Give this to them. . ." he said, and at once asked another question: "How are things at the Shterovka power station in the Donets Basin?"

He asked many other questions about the Donets Basin, and then said:

"You'd better not stay in Moscow too long, Comrade Klyavin. Return to your plant as quickly as you can. There are hard days ahead; the food situation is bad. . . ."

Rising, Lenin asked Klyavin about his health, saying that his secretary would help him to wind up his Moscow affairs if necessary.

Klyavin realised it was time to go, and took his leave.

Lenin brought the cake of soap and the brush from behind a stack of folders and books and handed them to him, laughing uproariously.

3

Klyavin returned to Staro-Petrovsk a few days later. Lenin's letter was read at workers' meetings on the day of his arrival. He had meant to make a special report on his trip and meeting with Lenin at an enlarged delegate conference, but did not manage to.

The question of food, of bread, came to be as painfully acute, as in the spring of the previous years. The last wheat consignment did not reach Staro-Petrovsk intact; some trucks addressed to them had been uncoupled and rerouted. One night Klyavin, accompanied by his orderly, galloped forty kilometres to the gubernia centre Bakhmut.

That year few lights were visible in the Donets Basin. The town of Gorlovka that lay half-way was not so much seen as guessed at by the glowing pattern of smouldering sulphur on its huge slag hills, the accumulations of decades.

He rode into Bakhmut at sunrise.

Despite the early hour the former girls' school that housed the Army Supply Depot was as tightly surrounded with carts and saddled horses as at a country fair. A sentry stood at the entrance, and nervous, high-pitched voices could be heard within whenever the door opened. People lay fast asleep in the carts and on the ground; some had been waiting there for days.

Klyavin entered the building, showing the sentry his pass. The assistant chief who usually handled all current problems was absent. Grim waiting queues of factory directors, supply agents, factory and mine committee chairmen filled the corridors and ante-room. The depot chief, Yepifanov, sat at the apparatus in the telegraph room. The sentry would allow no one to enter that room.

Klyavin made the attempt, showing his documents, but was firmly repulsed.

"Good Lord! But I've got a letter from Lenin!" he cried in desperation.

He snatched the letter from his wallet and unfolded it. The sentry saw the seal of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and vacillated long enough for Klyavin to plunge through the door.

The telegraph apparatus rattled dryly in the room, slowly ejecting the tape. Yepifanov raised a pair of eyes wild with sleeplessness.

"Get out of here!" he blurted. "I won't talk to you! My assistant will take care of everything, everything."

Tall and broad-shouldered, he strode towards Klyavin, his boots dragging endless telegraph tape in their wake. The sun was shining through the window, but an electric light blazed over the apparatus, for here they had lost track of nights and days.

Klyavin pleadingly extended Lenin's letter. Yepifanov reached for it, read it, and softened.

"Things are bad, Comrade Klyavin. And they'll be worse. But what can I do?"

Klyavin explained that a project approved by Lenin could not be discarded, that exceptions had to be made for Staro-Petrovsk, that every sack of wheat brought to that place would be distributed not according to the equalitarian wage system, but for quantities of coal and metal actually produced. Yepifanov listened intently, though he was frequently called to the apparatus. Nervously shifting his heavy, stubborn chin, he contacted various stations, kept an eye on every train heading for the Donets Basin, on every car-load of food, calling the various loading stations, dictating sharp peremptory instructions. Turning to Klyavin, he said:

"As to grain, I can't make any promises. Supplies have been cut to a quarter for the metal-works. The distribution among them was planned by your chiefs in Kharkov. And we probably won't even manage that. On my own responsibility I could add several truck-loads of oilcake and perhaps..." Yepifanov smiled fitfully. "All right, for Lenin's sake I'll let you have a truck-load of maize, too."

Klyavin kept bargaining tenaciously, until he got another truck, another half-truck.

Yepifanov jotted down the numbers of the trucks, summoned his secretary, ordered him to fill out the necessary papers, and then advised Klyavin to speak to Vladimirov, People's Food Commissar of the Ukraine.

"He may give you something, too...."

"Where is he?"

"He's at Volnovakha Station now. Where he'll be tomorrow nobody knows."

From Bakhmut Klyavin headed straight for Kharkov, for the offices of the Heavy Industry Central Board. There he argued for a change in the distribution plan tailored to the proportion of mouths to be fed at the factories, but accomplished nothing and left after a frightful quarrel in which he called the chairman "Lord-Custodian of the

"Poor Houses". In Kharkov, however, a factory locomotive was put at his disposal and he was able to go in hot pursuit of the Food Commissar who kept roving the railways of the Ukraine in a special train. This trip netted him a thing or two, and also some promises, but it was all pitifully inadequate for the thousands at the Staro-Petrovsk Works.

Returning to his plant, Klyavin consulted the bureau of the Party organisation and delivered a report on the food situation at a session of the factory committee in the evening. The shop chairmen, most of them elderly non-Party workers, listened to his quiet words grimly, for he was talking of the grave food situation, describing the trouble he had had, and enumerating the truck-loads of food he had been able to get. As though thinking aloud, he made his calculations with a bowed head. The chief thing was to supply the works with coal, to haul 800 tons of fuel to the surface every day. That would decide the outcome. It had to be possible for the miners to earn two to three pounds of bread a shift on the basis of unlimited piece-work. How much would that leave for the other trades and professions? Some rapid figuring showed there would be a quarter of a pound a day per man. That would have to do, somehow, until the next harvest.

Klyavin sat down, lost in thought. Suddenly he noticed how quiet the room was, and looked up. None of the workers said anything. Rodion Nikitin sat nearest, a be-whiskered furnaceman, a giant of a man, and Klyavin saw tears in his eyes! Nikitin had a large family, as Klyavin knew. The big fellow smeared his tears away, allowing no drop to slide down his cheeks leathered by the eternal heat of the furnace.

Klyavin searched the other faces. All were motionless. The quiet was unbroken.

He had been through a lot in the years of revolution. He had seen the counter-revolutionary insurrection in

Kazan, and the retreat from Warsaw; he had seen his friends and comrades die.... But these seconds of silence, these unshed tears, this simple stillness were the most crushing. If only they had protested, cursed and shouted, he would have felt better.

After a brief discussion the factory committee approved the plan for the distribution of what food there was.

4

But the days grew harder, and July 1921 was the worst month the Donets Basin had ever known. Its mines sent 384,000 tons of coal to the surface in May, 288,000 tons in June, and 144,000 tons in July. That was not even enough to pump the water from the mines.

The largest mines were flooded, and whole districts seemed to lie dead. The fuel reserves at the stations had usually been stacked up for many days ahead, but were now counted by hours and not by days. The supply of props from Tsaritsyn ceased, and all traffic along the railways from the Caucasus had practically stopped. Often there was no coal for the locomotives hauling wheat from the Kuban.

The blast-furnaces went out in Makeyevka and Yuzovka, those that had been put into operation in the Soviet Republic's first year of peace. The Staro-Petrovsk furnace was the only one still working in the whole of the Donets Basin.

The calamity was heightened by the hot dry summer. Hot winds blew incessantly, driving scorching black clouds of dust over the steppes. The emaciated horses collapsed in the mines. There was no fodder. The grass-lands had been burnt up by the sun, and the thatch had to be torn from the roofs in the villages. Dragged out of the mines after dark, the skinny blind horses nibbled the prickly withered grass. They were let down into the mines

again in the morning. A horse could barely be shoved into the small cage of the old-time Donets Basin. Its legs had to be tied so that it could be dumped into a coal truck by force and rolled into the cage, kicking and trembling.

Klyavin spent those three months mostly travelling between Staro-Petrovsk and Bakhmut. The gangs lurking in the gullies overgrown with brushwood and shaggy trees became more numerous that summer. Klyavin was never without his Mauser and on two occasions exchanged fire with them during night journeys. He concentrated all his intelligence and energy upon obtaining an extra truck-load of grain, lentils, or oilcake, a few hundred pounds of rusty herrings, or three or four barrels of fat.

There were days, for all that, when the workers did not get even a quarter of a pound of anything resembling bread.

It was on such a day that he was called to the telephone suddenly. He was wanted by the Party organisation in the blast-furnace section.

"What's up?"

"Come and see!" snapped the Party Secretary. "Drop everything, and come at once!"

Clearing several steps at a time, Klyavin bounded from the second floor, clinging to the swinging holster of his Mauser. He ran to the works as fast as he could. There was something ominous in the very air, in the stifling July atmosphere. Within seconds he knew what had happened and stopped short, listening hard. Where was the droning of the blast-furnace? The regular humming of the motor? The works had come to a standstill. Klyavin moaned through clenched teeth, and lunged on.

From afar he could see the big crowd in the foundry yard. The shouts were merging into a roar. Someone rose above the others, began to speak, but was pulled down.

On the stone foundations of the furnace, on the black armoured sides of the hot-blast stoves, on the boilers, on

the walls of the blast-furnace shack, above and below and wherever he looked he saw the huge chalk letters—Bread! Bread! Bread!

Klyavin saw the Party Secretary Glushko running towards him. White-faced, Glushko plunged into the crowd trying to reach the stand from which the previous speaker had been dislodged, and Klyavin pushed in the same direction. Working his shoulders, clinging to his Mauser, and feeling the angry nudges in his back and sides, he squeezed forward.

Glushko was the first to climb the iron bottom of an overturned wheelbarrow. Klyavin leapt up beside him. Several of the plant's Party members had already reached the spot; others were still trying to. Klyavin had lost his cap, the buttons of his brown tunic had sprung off, and his collar was torn open, exposing his soiled shirt and bare chest.

The desperate mob of thousands pressed in on all sides. The point of maximum tension, always incalculable, had been passed.

Klyavin looked at the distorted faces blackened with the dust of the mine. The whites of their eyes flashed wherever he turned. The workers were in rags, some of them wearing caps they had made of canvas mittens.

Glushko raised a hand and began to shout about the duty of the revolutionary proletariat. But the crowd was in no mood to let him talk and closed in on the overturned wheelbarrow. A pair of black hands caught hold of Glushko's tunic, trying to drag him down.

That was the moment Klyavin made an unpardonable mistake—he reached mechanically for his Mauser. There was a great shout and a worker of giant stature sprang onto the wheelbarrow, displacing Glushko with a shove. Ripping his shirt from his chest in rage, he roared:

"Go ahead, shoot! I've had all I can stand! Kill me, you bastard!"

Klyavin recognised Rodion Nikitin, the furnace-man who had almost wept at the factory committee meeting, and was suddenly hopeless and weak. How could he gain the attention of this desperate crowd? He looked behind to where the now silent blast-furnace towered. Through all the four years of revolution it had never gone out, but tomorrow it would be cold and dead.

The furnace-man kept crowding Klyavin with his mighty bare chest. His mouth opened spasmodically and there was foam at the corners. Klyavin felt something terrible was about to happen, but was suddenly transfixed by an idea. Snatching his wallet from a side pocket, he shouted hoarsely:

"Have you forgotten Lenin's letter?"

His fingers caught the precious bit of paper, drew it out, and thrust it to Nikitin. The furnace-man took it into his own fingers incredulously, unfolded it, and saw the signature. His hands trembled, and his face brightened as he began to read Lenin's lines aloud.

Though most of the crowd could not understand what had happened on the overturned wheelbarrow, their shouts gradually subsided and Lenin's words rang far and wide through the gloomy silence of the plant that had come to a standstill. Those words caught the attention of all, sinking into everyone's memory for a long time to come, if not forever.

"... The condition of the working class is desperately hard. . . . People are suffering terribly. . . . Never has the distress of the working class been as great and agonizing as in the epoch of their dictatorship. . . ."

Vladimir Ilyich was able to do the hardest thing in the world: to tell the truth naturally and simply. It was this sharp, straightforward truth that astounded and captivated everybody.

"There is no other way out now, than to make another great effort, the kind that could never be made by any

but the working class, the most revolutionary, most heroic class in the history of mankind. . . ."

Finished with the last line, Nikitin wiped his forehead with his hand, looked around, and quietly asked:

"Well, what do you think, comrades?"

He was pressed back, for everyone shoved forward to see Lenin's handwriting, to feel that paper with their own hands. Nikitin handed it to someone; it was read again and passed on through the crowd.

Klyavin never got that letter back and never saw it again after that day. It seemed to have melted away, to have faded away among those to whom it had been addressed. It was later said that it had been read aloud down in the mine, but who had it last and who saw it last was something no one ever learned.

The letter has apparently been lost for all time. Only its story is left.

It is hardly necessary to add that the Staro-Petrovsk furnace did not go out. It was the only one kept burning in the South throughout the summer of 1921, until the new harvest came.

This legend is still told among the old workers of the Donets Basin.

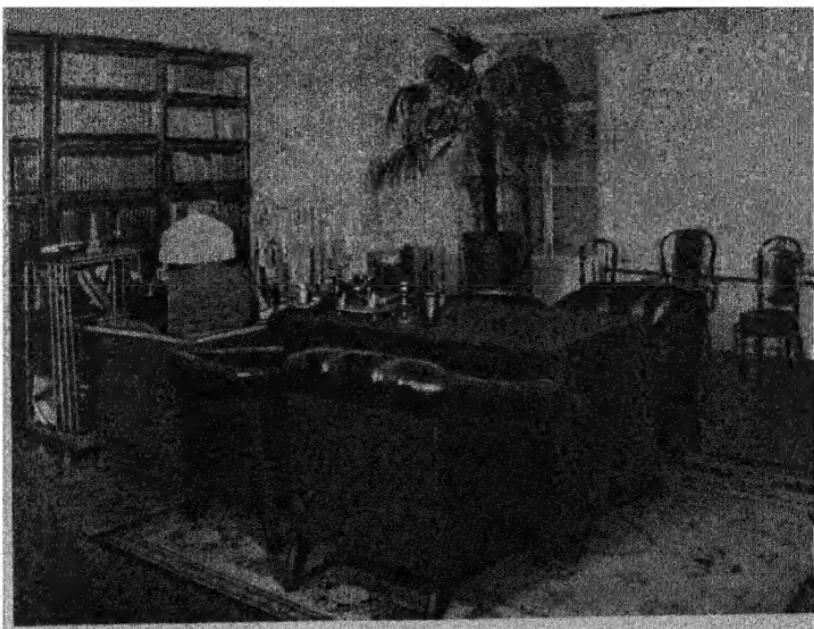
But is it really a legend?

Lenin's study in the Kremlin

A room in Lenin's apartment in  
the Kremlin

Next two pages:

Lenin and Sverdlov by the Kremlin wall in Red Square on the occasion of the unveiling of a memorial plaque to those who died for peace and the brotherhood of the peoples. Moscow, November 7, 1918







# **SERGEI ANTONOV**

Sergei Fyodorovich Antonov has been connected with Soviet literature for about two decades. In recent years he has written the children's narratives "The Far Traveller", "The Decisive Step", and several collections of stories about Lenin: "The Features We Love", "For All of Us", and "Petitioner at the Kremlin".

**PETITIONER  
AT THE  
KREMLIN**

**L**enin stood at the window, his hands deep in his pockets. The study with its two windows and high vaulted ceiling was cold and damp. These last weeks of winter had been particularly harsh.

Vladimir Ilyich could see the shell-scarred Arsenal. The Troitskaya Tower with its great eagle standing out clearly against the grey sky did not seem as tall as when seen from the riding school. He could also see a segment of the Kremlin wall and the barracks building. The square where the cobble-stones had settled, forming hollows in various spots, was fringed with slender lampposts strung along the Arsenal towards the Nikolskaya Tower, like blades of grass, all bent at the tips.

The snow was trampled and dirty on the paths to the Troitskaya Tower, the Arsenal, and on the square surrounded with lampposts. Only on the roofs and the Kremlin wall the snow lay neat and even like the icing on cakes.

Outside the Kremlin wall the brick houses stood gripped by the frost. He could just barely discern the chimneys beyond the Rumyantsev Museum and Library, but nowhere was there a wisp of smoke, for there was no fuel.

Winter had smitten Moscow hard. In addition to its enemies hunger and ruin, the country, tormented and bleeding from the Civil War, faced yet another—the bitter frosts.

Typhus was raging.

Lenin sighed. Drawing his right hand from his pocket suddenly, he sat down at his desk.

The simple pen he took up could have belonged to a schoolboy. Swiftly it ran over the paper, scratching unfinished and abbreviated words difficult to decipher. His thoughts ran ahead of his pen, but he kept hard after them, writing: "See if the children's homes have been supplied with firewood. If not, make sure they are. . . . Increase the sugar and saccharin rations of the workers in the metallurgical industry. . . . The People's Commissariat of Educa-

tion has delayed publishing books for the villages. I'll have to talk to Lunacharsky, scold him.... Acquaint the comrades with the decree and have it confirmed.... Write a note to Kamenev.... They're offering help from abroad.... Will we manage on our own or not?"

His pen point hovered for a moment.

The door to the session hall, padded and faced with white oilcloth, opened a trifle as his secretary peeped in.

"Vladimir Ilyich!" he said softly.

But Lenin did not answer. He was engrossed in his thoughts.

"Vladimir Ilyich!"...

"What is it?" Lenin looked up, reaching for a fresh sheet of paper.

"Comrade Korshunov is here. He would like to see you."

"All right."

The secretary vanished, and Vladimir Ilyich continued to write, trying to finish his note to Sergei Sergeyevich Kamenev. His pen ran on until the slight frail figure of the scientist, an old acquaintance, appeared at the door. The visitor seemed embarrassed and shy as Lenin rose to meet him.

"Come in, Leonid Alexeyevich, do come in!" Vladimir Ilyich gestured him to one of the soft armchairs. "Won't you sit down...."

Leonid Alexeyevich Korshunov hurried to the chair, sat down, and hid his legs under the table at right angles to Lenin's desk. The scientist felt he had moved too precipitously, grew confused and even more awkward. But seeing Lenin return to his wicker chair, he regained his composure, and turned to face him.

"How are you keeping, Leonid Alexeyevich?" asked Lenin. "No complaints?"

"Very well, thank you. I can't complain."

"That's good. Times are hard, Leonid Alexeyevich, but we must bear up."

Korshunov coughed apologetically and said:

"I've come about that expedition to Siberia, Vladimir Ilyich. I'm sure you must have heard of the event of June 30, 1908, an occurrence of exceptional interest to the scientific world. It was a rare thing, extraordinary for its scope, and perhaps its importance as well. The Siberian taiga was hit by a meteorite." Korshunov looked up and noted that Lenin was listening attentively.

The scientist felt that Lenin knew all about the meteorite, that he knew of his, Korshunov's own thoughts and plans, and that his explanation was only wasting the precious time of a very busy man. His voice faltered, therefore, as he went on:

"Now that meteorite.... But I'm sure you know all about it...."

"You shouldn't be so sure," said Lenin. "I know a meteorite fell somewhere, but that's all, Leonid Alexeyevich. Go on...."

Leaning towards the scientist, he confided with a smile: "I've even forgotten the year."

Korshunov smiled too.

"It's a queer thing," continued Lenin earnestly. "Many people think the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and the People's Commissars know everything! That's dangerous nonsense! Actually we know very little, disgracefully little! The more often we talk with you, the better. Go on, Leonid Alexeyevich, and take your time."

Heartened, Korshunov continued, outlining an idea he had long meant to convey to Lenin.

"When we remember that the largest known meteorite weighs thirty-six and a half tons, and the second biggest, the Mexican meteorite, as we call it, weighs twenty-seven tons, then the Siberian meteorite must have dwarfed any of its predecessors, it seems to me. The trouble is that we do not exactly know where that meteorite came down."

"And you'd like to find it?" suggested Vladimir Ilyich as Korshunov paused.

"That's right. Quite right. I'd like to find that meteorite. I understand," he hastened to add, "that meteorites are not the chief thing now.... But I'd ask for so little, ever so little. It's painful to know they are forming societies abroad to study our Russian meteorite, while we...."

"No, no!" interjected Lenin. "No one abroad shall have anything to do with this. They had better give up the idea. What do you need for your expedition?"

"I've prepared an estimate." Korshunov brought some neatly folded papers from his breast-pocket. "I did my best to be reasonable, Vladimir Ilyich...."

Lenin looked through the list of items, and the longer he looked the graver he became. Laying the papers on his desk, he smoothed them with his left hand, and eyed the scientist with severe and, as Korshunov felt, saddened features.

The scientist slowly raised his eyes and added hesitatingly:

"Well.... Perhaps I could reduce that list a little. We could ask for less bread.... As for the instruments.... We could do with one theodolite less, I suppose. Apart from that, we...."

But Lenin no longer saw the scientist; his eyes were fixed on a far corner of the room. He seemed oblivious of his visitor.

"We could do with one theodolite less...." he echoed the words, turning his narrowed eyes on Korshunov. Shoving his wicker chair back suddenly, he arose as though in angered surprise, drummed the papers with his fingers for an instant, and stepped round his desk.

Keeping his eyes off Korshunov, he thrust his hands into his pockets, glanced casually at the window, and began to pace the room.

"You'll be out in the taiga." He spoke sharply, em-

phatically, as though trying to make the scientist see the real situation. "Thousands of versts of tangled forests, torrential rivers, wild animals, and no roads. You won't find a soul for hundreds of miles around. . . . Do you realise that?"

He paused.

"You understand all that, of course," he continued in a gentler tone. Looking at the list again, he went on: "A pound of bread a day, five pounds of sugar for all, tobacco. . . ." His voice wavered from severity to irritation, to surprise, sinking suddenly to sadness.

"We could dispense with the sugar, but the tobacco, excuse me for saying so, is imperative: it'll keep the mosquitoes away!" the scientist remarked gravely.

Hardly hearing him, Vladimir Ilyich continued:

"Fur lining for the instrument containers. For the instruments!" he reiterated.

Korshunov arose, his spectacles blazing in the reflected light from the window. His was the determination of a man reaching for his last recourse.

"Vladimir Ilyich!" he said firmly. "We've got to go! Just think how lucky we are. It was on our territory and no one else's that that meteorite fell, a rare guest from the cosmos. And what have we done about it? Just imagine how many expeditions would have rushed to the spot if it had fallen in France, in America! We're poor, it's true, we're hungry and hard-pressed by the interventionists, but does that mean we can't appreciate and make the most of an opportunity that has fallen to us alone? World science is not to blame for our poverty. We've got to go, Vladimir Ilyich!"

He sank into his armchair.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Lenin, approaching the scientist. "Of course you must, you extraordinary man! We'll give you what you ask for, but that's too little! Who goes to Siberia with equipment like that? It would barely do for

an expedition around Moscow! It's hardly anything at all! What a pity!" Korshunov now realised what had hurt Vladimir Ilyich. "What a pity we can't give people like you everything they need, everything they deserve! But never mind! Just give us time!"

"Yes, but..." stammered Korshunov, looking at Lenin. He had evidently meant to say something more, but sighed with relief instead, and wiped his brow.

Lenin came a little closer to him, asking with interested concern:

"If we gave you only what you asked for in that incredibly modest list, would you go, Leonid Alexeyevich?" He pointed to Korshunov's papers. "Would you?"

"There's nothing I'd like better, Vladimir Ilyich! Let the snow thaw, and we'll get ready. That's all we need, honestly. Everybody keeps asking you for things.... Where are all those things to come from?"

"So you would go," reiterated Lenin.

"Yes, I would."

"And ask for nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"Nothing at all, Leonid Alexeyevich?"

"Nothing."

Lenin coughed, looked down at something under the table, and smiled wryly.

"All right, Leonid Alexeyevich," he said cheerfully. "Won't you step over to that window?"

"What for, Vladimir Ilyich?"

"Because I'd like you to, Leonid Alexeyevich. Over to that window."

"But why, Vladimir Ilyich?"

"Please, Leonid Alexeyevich. Do me the favour. Just go to that window!" Lenin shook his finger. "I know why you won't."

"Oh no, Vladimir Ilyich. If you agree to everything, I won't waste any more of your time...."

"Oh no!" mocked Lenin good-naturedly. "I haven't agreed yet. Be kind enough to walk to that window, Leonid Alexeyevich."

Korshunov reluctantly arose, eyeing Lenin uncertainly. Lenin watched him narrowly.

"Well!"

"All right!" Korshunov had made up his mind and stepped from behind his table.

Lenin looked at the scientist's shoes:

"There you are. It's just as I thought. What are you going to go to the taiga in, my friend? In those torn shoes which will surely fall apart five miles out of Moscow?"

"Why not?" grumbled Korshunov. "I could tie them together with a string. I could wrap some cloths round my feet and tie them up!"

"So you could," said Lenin thoughtfully. "This is your only pair, I suppose."

"How could I have another pair? That is, I had another pair once, but wore them out. I've been taking special care of these."

"So you'll go in these," said Lenin. "Forgive me, Leonid Alexeyevich, but...."

Lenin touched his shoulder and urged him gently back into his chair. Regarding the scientist earnestly, he added: "I hope you're not offended." Convinced that he was not, he resumed pacing the room.

"We've got some extraordinary people," he said. "Take Tsiolkovsky. Imagine a provincial Russian town. Some-where, in an old wooden house on a grass-covered street, where geese and pigs probably roam undisturbed, there is an old teacher of mathematics. He gets his rations of bread and herring and is engrossed with the problems of interplanetary flight. And that, probably, in an unheated room. And you, old man, are on the same track, wanting to walk a thousand versts through the taiga, through Siberia, in a pair of torn boots!"

"What about you?" thought Korshunov. "You're building socialism in a country where not everyone can even read the word!"

The scientist suddenly realised that he and Lenin were united in a great thing, that they were working for the same cause, and that that cause was the chief thing in the life of Tsiolkovsky exploring the universe in Kaluga, in the lives of the hungry workers rebuilding the factories, and of the peasants tilling the soil with their wooden ploughs....

Korshunov left Lenin's study in an excited, ecstatic condition. Hurrying across the Kremlin, he emerged on the Red Square, thinking of tomorrow, of the dream that was sure to come true.

... The time would come when the factory chimneys would be smoking again, even those that did not yet exist: tractor and automobile plants now being conceived by the man in the frosty little study with the vaulted ceiling.... The words of Pushkin and Tolstoi would be accessible to everyone then, for backward, half-wild Russia would turn into a country in which all would be able to read and write.... The scientific expeditions would surely reach the North Pole, and someone might descend to the bottom of the ocean, or rise beyond the atmosphere. The leaders of those expeditions would not have to trouble the organiser of a huge new state for a crust of bread, for a pinch of tobacco.... New people would grow up by then with a new understanding of man's mission.... All this was sure to come.

Meanwhile he saw the streets buried in snow-drifts, the passers-by hurrying through the frost, a horse slowly hauling a wagon whose driver kept shouting "Giddup, you mangy brute!", the little boarded up stores with iron signs reading: "Martyanov", "Gurin & Sons, Wholesalers", "I. V. Koshkin, Hardware". But all this was there only for the time being.





... A small group of Red Army men in winter helmets plodded by, hauling a heap of rattling pipes on a sleigh: they must be out to restore or build something. Through one of the windows he caught sight of the portrait of Karl Marx, and the first words of some slogan or other: "Long live...." A woman in a red kerchief flitted from one house entrance to another.

Meanwhile, the strong square-set man in the Kremlin, the heart of a vast country, kept thinking, jotting down his thoughts, swiftly, energetically, for fresh achievements and exploits that would transform Russia were clearly visible to him.

**THE MESSENGER  
FROM  
PAKHOMOVKA**

**A**n elderly peasant in new bast shoes and a worn coat of homespun cloth caught up at the waist with a rope softened by long use shuffled hesitantly at the door, and then slowly approached the desk of Lenin's secretary in Smolny. He held his cap in one hand and a bundle in the other. His coat and bundle smelled of rye bread and smoke, and brought to mind threshing-barns, stubbled and bare fields where potato tops are burned, blue autumn skies and the cries of the cranes stringing southward to warmer lands.

He greeted the secretary with a deferential bow.

"How do you do, comrade," answered the secretary, a young woman, raising her eyes.

"Could I see Lenin..." he said, uncertainly adding, "comrade...?"

"Why Lenin, exactly? What do you want to see him about?"

"It's something everybody wants to know—it's about land, comrade."

"What do you want to know about the land? Something unclear? Hasn't the decree reached you?"

"It has," answered the peasant. Sighing, he began to rummage in his bag.

"Won't you sit down, comrade," suggested the secretary. "What's your name?"

"Pakhomov," answered the visitor sinking to a chair. "Our village is full of Pakhomovs. It's even called Pakhomovka. And the villages around us too. There's Little Pakhomovka and New Pakhomovka. We're all Pakhomovs.... There...." He handed the secretary a sheet of paper. It was worn at the folds, and pasted up at several rents.

The secretary took it from him, examining it closely.

"Was this the document that told you the land was yours?" she asked, surprised.

"Yes, that's the paper...."

The secretary spread it gingerly on the desk. It was a rather illiterate hand-written copy of the Decree on Land on a page divided by red and black vertical lines under the heading "Debit". It had evidently been torn from the books of some office. The paper was so worn at the folds, moreover, that some words and even sentences could hardly be distinguished.

"Well!" marvelled the secretary, eyeing this home-made scrap of a document which had undoubtedly come through hundreds of calloused peasant hands.

How many eyes must have devoured it to make sure that the land was now indeed "ours". The thing seemed incredible. The secretary knew from experience that the village messengers sent to Lenin were usually troubled by questions connected with the transfer of the land to peasants. Apart from this, the community that had sent Pakhomov had evidently been worried about the authenticity of the document, or rather, whether a Decree on Land really existed.

That is why she directed the messenger to the Assistant People's Commissar of Agriculture.

"But that won't do," said Pakhomov with a deep sigh. "The community sent me to Lenin. And it's him I've got to see. Him personally!"

"I quite understand that, Comrade Pakhomov, but Vladimir Ilyich couldn't possibly receive everybody, much as he would like to. Now the comrade I'm sending you to deals precisely with land questions, and he'll explain everything very well. He is the Assistant People's Commissar of Agriculture."

"I see," said Pakhomov, obviously disturbed. "So it's to the commissar I'll have to go to, after all? But what if I get nowhere with the commissar? Will I be able to see Lenin then?" Still holding his open bag, he cast a slanting glance at the secretary.

She caught the cunning in his eye and thought: no wonder the community had sent no one but Pakhomov to Petrograd.

"Then you'll see Lenin," she reluctantly agreed.

"That's a deal!" Pakhomov slapped the table. He arose with the mien of a man who meant to return.

The desk pointed out to Pakhomov as the one belonging to the Assistant People's Commissar looked exactly like any of the other ten in the same large room: it was an ordinary office desk covered with a green cloth abundantly bespattered with blots of purple ink.

Its owner was nowhere around, and Yegor Pakhomov sat drumming the green cloth with his fingers, eyeing the general lay-out. He did not like it very much. It was not respectable, or perhaps impressive enough to inspire confidence, or provoke at least the minimal anxiety Yegor Pakhomov felt was essential under such circumstances. "The authorities may be new, but they are in power! And power, especially supreme power, should inspire respect and fear, if only a little...." This was all different. The visitors roamed freely from desk to desk occupied by people dressed in all sorts of ways, some of them even women. The place was noisy, too, with telephones ringing and typewriters working away.... A large cabinet was being hauled through the door, and someone near by was hammering up a "No smoking" sign.

The desk where Yegor Pakhomov waited was finally approached by a man of medium height. He wore high boots and a grey shirt outside his trousers in the Russian fashion. He looked like a mechanic or a village school-teacher. Taking his seat at the desk, he asked:

"Did you want to see me, comrade?"

Yegor Pakhomov looked at him and got up, hesitating to answer:

"So you're the commissar?"

"Assistant."

"My respects!" said Pakhomov.

"How do you do, comrade. What did you want to see me about?"

"About the land. . . ."

"Is there something unclear in the decree?"

Pakhomov nodded, and looked critically about again. How could one get something sensible out of such a room and from such people, he thought, but he would have to say why he had come. . . .

He turned to the man at the desk.

"I'll try to explain it to you," said the Assistant People's Commissar quietly, as though addressing a class of students.

"The landed estates have been confiscated by the Revolution without compensation and immediately. That's one thing!" he declared with an emphatic gesture. "Now what does that mean? That means, first of all that. . . ."

"Excuse me," interrupted a man in uniform. "There are some papers in that cabinet. I've got to have them." He pointed to a cabinet behind the Assistant People's Commissar.

The latter moved aside, lifting his chair with him.

"That means, first of all," he went on, "that the land which previously belonged to the landowners, the monasteries, and the members of the tsar's family is to be handed over without compensation for use by all working people, by those who actually till the land. From this historic moment it is you, the peasants, who are the full-fledged masters of the land."

"No, they're not in the cabinet," said the man in uniform regretfully. "They must be in the left drawer, over there." He pointed to the edge of the desk where the Assistant People's Commissar sat.

He merely lifted himself and his chair to his former position, continuing warmly:

"The land—to the producers! The epoch of the exploiters

has ended, and that of the real masters of the planet has begun!"

"I'm sorry," interrupted the man in uniform again. "Those papers are evidently in the middle drawer."

The Assistant People's Commissar stepped from behind his desk, sat down on a ream of papers beside Yegor Pakhomov, and continued:

"The land is all yours from now on. Yours forever!"

Within five minutes the new cabinet was eased into place, and the desk had to be removed. This left the Assistant People's Commissar and Yegor Pakhomov sitting beside an empty space.

"What a commissar! What a master of the Earth!" thought Pakhomov.

He listened patiently until the Assistant People's Commissar had finished, asked a few perfunctory questions, received a copy of the Decree on Land, expressed his thanks, and went away.

All the messengers who came to Petrograd on various matters invariably wanted to see Lenin, to look at him, to speak to him, shake his hand, and convince themselves of his physical existence with their own eyes. Apart from this, and that was the chief thing, the truth about the new world, its ideas and meaning, by no means clear to everyone, and its forms, not understood by all as yet, were concentrated, as never before in the history of mankind, in one name: Lenin. It was through him that cryptic things came to be comprehensible, that things which had but recently seemed alien, came to be familiar and dear, that the improbable came to be possible.

Each and every messenger craved the right to be able to tell those who had sent him to Petrograd: "That's what Lenin told me! I spoke to him myself. I saw him!"

When Yegor Pakhomov returned to Lenin's secretary she was not surprised. "He's going to try to see Vladimir Ilyich, like all the others," she thought.

"Well, what luck did you have?" she asked Pakhomov. "We had a talk," he answered evasively, but added meaningfully: "I sat on a chair, and the commissar on a stack of papers." He was silent for an instant, but then firmly declared: "I've simply got to see Lenin, dear comrade. What'll I tell the community? That I wasn't allowed to see Lenin himself? Please, comrade, have some respect for the Pakhomovs!"

The secretary sighed, feeling it would be useless to tell him how busy Lenin was, that he had been having only two to three hours sleep a day.

"Wait a moment," she said. "I'll see when Vladimir Ilyich can speak to you."

"That's fine!" exclaimed Pakhomov happily. "Just what I want!"

He sat down to wait.

Several sailors came out of Lenin's study, and a group of other men, evidently workers, entered. The workers were followed by soldiers, and the soldiers by a bespectacled man in an expensive fur coat. The secretary went in to see Lenin several times.

"He'll be able to see you soon," she soothed.

"Thanks," said Pakhomov gratefully, adding in a worried note: "I can wait, of course. Let Comrade Lenin choose his own time."

The bespectacled man in the expensive fur coat finally left, and there was no one else in the study with Lenin now. He must have been free for the moment, but the secretary waved Pakhomov back to his chair:

"In ten minutes, comrade."

The secretary soon went off somewhere, and Yegor Pakhomov decided that Lenin must be having something like an intermission.

In five minutes, which seemed like half an hour to him, Yegor Pakhomov impatiently got up; but feeling it was foolish to be standing there like a hitching post, he

sat down. In a minute or so he was up again, in spite of himself, pacing the ante-room. He had forgotten to look at the clock when the secretary told him to wait ten minutes, and was now troubled, wondering how much time had passed. Who knew but that Lenin was fretting inside, waiting for him, losing precious minutes, while he, Yegor Pakhomov, just would not come in.... And the secretary was still nowhere to be seen.

This was more than he could bear; he opened the door a way and entered the study, his bag still in his hand.

A strong stocky man in a worn suit sat eating from a battered soldier's mess-tin at a little table near a large writing desk.

"Could this be Lenin?!"

Yegor Pakhomov stopped in his tracks.

"Come in, come in, comrade!" said the man waving his spoon. "Sit down, I'll be free in a minute. What's your name?"

"Pakhomov," came the perplexed reply. "Why yes, of course he's Lenin!"

"Won't you sit down, Comrade Pakhomov, right here." Lenin indicated a chair near his own. "From the village? About the land?" he asked animatedly when his visitor sat down. "That's very interesting."

Pakhomov sat on the edge of his chair, staring at Lenin, the mess-tin, the spoon, and the dry-looking gruel. He could not come to himself somehow, though he clearly heard what was being said. But the words addressed to him and the purpose of his visit slipped into the background for a while.

"Gruel," he said nodding at the mess-tin. "Gruel ... without butter!"

"Without butter for the time being," answered Lenin.

"Jesus Christ! Comrade Lenin!" cried Pakhomov springing to his feet and plunging into his bag. "Who'd believe such a thing! By all the saints!"

He produced a hunk of bacon wrapped in a rag, part of a round loaf of bread, an onion, and some salt in a scrap of paper.

"Comrade Lenin!" blurted Pakhomov, tumbling everything on to the table beside the now empty mess-tin. "Please help yourself! Don't refuse!"

"No, thanks!" said Vladimir Ilyich firmly. "I've had enough."

"Comrade Lenin!" fumed Yegor Pakhomov. "Gruel without butter! Is that what you should eat?! Why, the muzhiks will hound me to death if I tell them that you ate dry gruel, and I, bacon!"

"If that's how it is, cut me a slice. To save your life!"

Yegor Pakhomov brought out a knife with a wooden grip, the blade made from a piece of a scythe; it was as sharp as a razor.

"Excellent bacon!" remarked Lenin munching the bacon and fragrant rye bread. "And the bread is good too! Haven't had anything like it for a long time.... You seem to be living pretty well. How do the people in the village feel? What do the peasants say about the decree?"

Lenin had signed the Decree on Land only a week or ten days before.... After the workers and soldiers had stormed the Winter Palace and Vladimir Ilyich had appeared at the session of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies where he proclaimed the victory of the first socialist revolution in history, after twenty hours of continuous nervous, physical, and mental strain, he retired to Bonch-Bruyevich's flat for a rest. Instead of resting, however, he waited for his hosts to fall asleep, for he was afraid to disturb them, and then sat down at a desk.... He kept writing all night, striking out and rewriting his lines until the grey of dawn in that late autumn of Petrograd spread over the windows. Only then did he lie down to sleep.

At breakfast, that morning, he produced a clean copy of his manuscript and read it aloud: "The Decree on Land".

The decree was adopted that very evening by the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets and published in the newspapers, as well as in a separate pamphlet.

Vladimir Ilyich was now to learn how it was accepted in the villages.

Having put his question, Vladimir Ilyich made himself comfortable, prepared to listen.

"What do they say about the decree? Well!" Pakhomov's air denoted both ecstasy and fright. "I've never seen such a hubbub yet!"

"So it has caused a stir in the village?" asked Lenin.

"Caused a stir? Why, the place is like a beehive. Everybody is out in the street now, bunching up and arguing."

"What are they arguing about?" came Lenin's quick question as he eyed Pakhomov narrowly.

"About many things, Comrade Lenin," answered Pakhomov. He began to enumerate them: "Should we take all the land or not. . . ."

"All the land, all of it!" prompted Vladimir Ilyich, wiping his fingers with a napkin, and shifting to his chair at the desk. "All of it, down to the last scrap. What else are they talking about?"

"Are we to make no payments at all, or just enough to keep the gentry from starving. . . ."

"None at all!" declared Lenin. "Land ownership has been abolished without any compensation whatever. The land shall pass to those to whom it rightfully belongs. What else are they arguing about?"

"There's something else, to tell the truth," continued Pakhomov, and it was evident that he was about to broach the main thing.

"What?"

Pakhomov sighed, brushed an ear, his nose, but spoke up with decision:

"The peasants are wondering," he said, "whether that land won't fetch them such a beating that they'll never get up again."

Lenin's brows gathered.

"Is that so?" he said slowly. "Where do you think such talk comes from?"

Pakhomov parted his hands.

"There must be a reason for it," continued Lenin. "There's a reason for everything."

"We're scared," quavered Yegor Pakhomov.

"It's frightening," agreed Lenin. "I understand. But tell me this, it's the main thing: whom are you afraid of? What's frightening?"

Yegor Pakhomov held his tongue.

"Do you think the landowners and the monasteries are glad to part with what was theirs for centuries?" demanded Lenin. "Of course not! That's why the monks and the landowners are using their people to threaten you with a beating. The question is, who is going to beat whom?"

"There are plenty who'd like to start, Comrade Lenin," observed Pakhomov.

"So there are," agreed Lenin. "But are you the kind who like to take a beating? I don't think so!"

"No, we're not, Comrade Lenin," answered Pakhomov earnestly. "But there are some who have plenty of muscle yet . . ."

"Our enemies?" asked Lenin quickly.

"Our enemies . . ." agreed Pakhomov.

"I see!" exclaimed Lenin. "Is Soviet power really strong? Strong enough to win out? Is that the question? It's clear! What'll happen if we seize the land and the new power collapses with the Bolsheviks and commissars scurrying off in all directions? That's when the peasants will catch hell for taking things into their own hands! I can see the point." Lenin stepped from behind his desk.

Approaching Pakhomov, he went on: "Soviet power will never be defeated by anyone, even if the whole capitalist world rallies against it. But its existence depends on all of us, and on you too, Comrade Pakhomov!"

The last words puzzled Yegor Pakhomov.

"Why on us, Comrade Lenin?"

"If only because you're eating bacon and good bread," said Lenin earnestly, "while the workers, the soldiers, sailors, and the scientists are getting, the devil knows what.... Yes indeed!"

Yegor Pakhomov studied the floor.... "We're not eating too well, either," he objected. "But not so badly, on the whole.... Better than they do in the cities, of course." He fixed his eyes on Lenin who was about to settle in his armchair, and added slowly:

"I think the peasants will give the workers bread.... They'll collect it...."

"That's fine!" declared Lenin. "This is a good thing we've thought up, Comrade Pakhomov! You may expect a visit from the workers' representatives!"

He jotted down something in his papers, already aware of how the happily found idea could be widely implemented.

"That's splendid, splendid, Comrade Pakhomov!" he said, smiling, but then asked, "What about the land? So you've decided not to take it? You're too scared?"

Yegor Pakhomov looked in one direction, then in the other, and announced in measured and important tones:

"The land was divided up within an hour, and all of it!"

The silence was complete for some moments. Then came reverberating thunder. Lenin had his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat; his head was thrown back and he was laughing from the bottom of his heart. He tried to stop sometimes, but saw Pakhomov, remembered his words, and was off again.

"All divided up!" he continued laughing. "Within an hour! And all of it! I see. And now you're worried...." He exploded again.

"We shan't worry any more, I think," said Pakhomov closing his bag. "But I've got a question, Comrade Lenin."

"Another? Go ahead. This is probably the main one!" exclaimed Vladimir Ilyich, narrowing his eyes mischievously. He spoke with zest, as though anticipating a difficult "intricate" question, something he would enjoy answering.

"I suppose so," agreed Pakhomov, gathering his thoughts.

"Let's have that main question."

"Well, you've been saying we shouldn't worry," began Pakhomov. "You've been saying that Soviet power will last forever. But what sort of power is it, excuse me for saying so, when the commissar hasn't even got a desk, a commissar without trousers, forgive me for putting it that way, and the other sits there, eating gruel without butter, and...."

"And is bald to boot!" Lenin cut in, imitating Pakhomov's tone.

Pakhomov lowered his eyes, saying nothing for an instant, to stress his respect.

"Eating gruel without butter," he repeated, "and rules the whole of Russia? What sort of power is that?"

"But what if you were elected to a Soviet?" answered Lenin. "You'd be representing Soviet power in bast shoes and a peasant's homespun coat held together, forgive me for saying so, with a rope round the waist. What sort of power would that be? Why, it would be your power! The power of the people!"

A smartly dressed man entered the room with measured steps. He had a wedge of a beard. His forehead was large and bright; and he was so thin that he seemed tall.

"Comrade Dzerzhinsky... Felix Edmundovich!" said Lenin to him, still smiling. "This is Comrade Pakhomov, a peasant.... He says they're afraid to seize the land, afraid it'll fetch them a beating.... I keep telling him about Soviet power, that it's here to stay, but he says Soviet power is unimpressive. Yet it appears that they've divided up the land long ago, and all of it, too!"

Vladimir Ilyich laughed again, offering his hand to Dzerzhinsky.

"How do you like that?" he asked and went on: "An enormous force has come into motion; and anyone who makes the mistake of getting in its way will be surely swept aside!"

He conducted Yegor Pakhomov to the door, shook his hand as he saw him out, and returned to Dzerzhinsky.

Leaving Lenin's study, Yegor Pakhomov stood very still for a while in the ante-room. Clicking his tongue, he began to look himself over. He eyed his bast shoes, the frayed hems of his coat... and the rope round his waist.

"And I represent Soviet power!" he reflected, smiling.

"Well?" asked the secretary. "Have you settled everything?"

"I've got to see the commissar again!" he answered, suddenly troubled.

"What?" cried the secretary, astonished. "You've just talked to Lenin. Aren't you satisfied?"

"I am.... But things didn't turn out very well when I spoke to the commissar," said Pakhomov remembering with a pang that the Assistant People's Commissar had told him exactly the same thing about the land as Lenin had, but that he had been unable to believe him, while fully believing Vladimir Ilyich, later on....

Pakhomov found the Assistant People's Commissar ensconced behind what was probably his permanent desk now. He was examining the drawers, putting some books and a few papers away.

Yegor Pakhomov extended his hand, saying:

"I'm leaving now. . . . Thanks a lot, comrade!"

"But you've said good-bye before!" recalled the Assistant People's Commissar, puzzled.

"Very true!" agreed Pakhomov. "But I'm doing it again!" He clasped the Assistant Commissar's hand firmly, overflowing with gratitude.





# **S. D A N G U L O V**

The tales of Lenin by the well-known Soviet journalist Savva Dangulov, assistant editor-in-chief of the magazine *Inostrannaya Literatura* (Foreign Literature), were presented as though written by the young diplomat and former worker Dmitry Dmitriyevich Rybakov. These stories are based on documents and recollections bearing on Vladimir Ilyich's meetings with Americans who came to Soviet Russia in the early years of the revolution. One of the stories of the series "Lenin Speaks to America" is included in this collection.

# **THE MANDATE**

remember the grey shimmering skies of Petrograd, the wind, the ghostly rapping of autumnal branches on the roof, and the troubled cry:

"Who goes there?"

From the window one could see the huge Narva Gate jostled by a mass of whitish mist. The fog sometimes descended on the gate, hiding it completely. Even so, one saw its hazy outlines, a blurred version of tottering columns and ruins. The one thing that stood out sharply night and day, in fog and wind, was the warning cry:

"Who goes there?"

The entrance of the building bore the emblem of the International Red Cross, the snow-white disk with the ruby cross in the centre. The main stairway led to the second floor, and its narrow carpet, worn at the folds, carried the traces of boots hob-nailed or spiked with wood, of soles of patterned rubber, of some with metal heels, and others crusted with clay, or moss from the marshes along the Vistula and the San.

The second floor was sombre and quiet. Twelve tables formed a severe, almost martial square. All were well used; they were occupied by lawyers, retired diplomats—there were a lot of these—pharmacists, army doctors and ordinary doctors, career officials and administrators—*influential chandlers* in flour, bandage, sunflower-seed oil, and iodine. We sat in a far-off corner, at the table for special sittings, four Bolsheviks from the Nikolayev Railway and the Russo-Baltic plant on the Malaya Nevka River. We had come the day before on orders from the Petrograd Soviet. Our corner and desk were called "The Red corner".\*

"That's not so bad, really," remarked my friend Paramon Dementyev nicknamed Socrates for his high brow.

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\* A pun on the Russian word "krasny" which means both "red" and "beautiful". The corner in which the icons were displayed in a Russian house was called "Krasny ugol", i.e., red or beautiful corner.

"The Red corner is the most honourable in anybody's house."

He spoke loudly enough to be heard by all twelve tables, but they made no comments, keeping an embarrassed silence.

It was not snowing that evening, but it was cold.

The door swung noisily open just then, admitting a man clutching his fists with a happy sigh of relief.

"Good evening, friends!" Dropping his heavy fur hat and shedding his Siberian cloak he stood massaging his cheeks for a long time. "Colonel Robins!" he announced offering a reddened hand to the nearest table. "Robins!" he reiterated at the next—he was evidently going to make the rounds of them all. "Robins. . . ."

So this was Raymond Robins! His official capacity of American Red Cross representative had been dimmed, it seemed, by something else. By the circumstance that Robins, miner, farmer, gold prospector, cowboy, businessman, and millionaire, had come to Petrograd. It was said he had linked his trip to Russia with far-reaching plans.

His hand was big and cold, still exuding the frost of December.

"Colonel Robins. . . ."

"Is our winter too cold for you, Mr. Robins?" I asked.

"Oh! Familiar accent! I can feel America! Have you ever been there?"

Had I ever been to America? I had, of course. I knew Nome, Sitka, Fairbanks, and even Fort Yukon, but why tell him that all at once? He had passed our desk anyway, and was stooping to open the stove door.

"There's nothing better than a northern winter," he remarked sinking into an armchair giving him a good view of all the twelve tables. "There's nothing better," he repeated absently, for he was thinking of something else now, something different and far more important. "What's the good of charity if its recipient has to sacrifice his

freedom," he said unexpectedly and raised his eyes. He extended his white hands to the open door of the stove whose glowing coals already frosted with ash lit his swollen bluish eyelids.

He then expressed the opinion that prosperous America could well help devastated Russia to restore her economy. He was a businessman and felt that such relations could be very beneficial to both Russia and America.

The quiet room grew even quieter as he spoke. Someone shuddered as if cold, while another reached for a handkerchief and mopped his forehead. Robins rose and looked round, his hands still hovering over the stove. I had the queer impression that the blue of his eyelids had spread and now shone luminously from both eye-sockets.

"Don't you think I could have a talk with Lenin, gentlemen?" he asked looking sharply, as though trying to read all twelve faces at once. Now I knew why he had taken the armchair commanding a view of all the tables. . . .

It was late when I went home. We lived in a wooden house belonging to the Moscow Railway Station in those years. My eldest brother had driven a freight train to Moscow the morning before. My father, sister-in-law, and her children were at home. The little house stood in the depths of a vast wind-swept yard. One could see its five windows from afar. Four of them were dark (my sister-in-law put her children to bed early), but the fifth was lit, for my father was in the habit of reading in the evening.

He had developed a passion for books during our travels in America. His small volumes of Chekhov's short stories accompanied us everywhere, reminding us of home. When we settled in Winnipeg for a time, he accumulated a small collection of books we managed to receive from Russia. He was fond of reading aloud, and we, of listening to him.

Beginning a book, he could never put it down, even if it failed to meet with his expectations. Finished with such a book, he would complain for a long time:

"Well, I've read it and . . . it's as empty as a drum! What did I bother to read it for?"

But more often than not he would say something like this:

"Tell me, Mitya, does the name of Pevtsov mean anything to you? . . . You ought to read his book about Kun-Lun and Jungaria. How it grips you!"

When he left his locomotive five years ago, he took the job of caretaker at the railway school. The children, like their teachers, respected him as an exceptionally well-read man with a flair for mathematics.

He was self-taught, had never finished even elementary school, and was proud to be able to talk to the senior students on equal terms about Pushkin and Tolstoi, and even solve an algebra problem once in a while. That pride, a little childish perhaps, explained why he had spent every farthing he had ever saved in his travels over the world to put me into a technical school. He wanted me to become a locomotive builder and was grieved when I went to work in the depot instead. Like all fathers, he wanted his son to do the things he had been unable to accomplish himself. The degree to which I achieved my aims would in his eyes represent the fulfilment of his cherished plans, of those of his brothers and the whole long dynasty of Rybakovs sprung from the Upper Volga peasants whose bony but powerful frames had hauled the barges and rafts up the great river for centuries.

The news of the Revolution had made him wary, but then inspired and carried him away.

"Doesn't this spell the end of their kingdom?" he once asked me, and then significantly added: "Beware of the stray bullet." He had obviously meant to give those words more meaning than they seemed to have. My new appointment to the Red Cross displeased him, but as always he expressed his irritation with a jest.

"Do they build any locomotives?" he asked.

"No," I said.

"Too bad," he answered with smiling eyes. "I wish the Red Cross built locomotives . . ."

It was nearly eleven. The fire in the stove had long since gone out. Father's unfinished book lay open, his spectacles marking the page he had got to. The electric light had been switched off an hour before, but an oil lamp was burning. Father listened to me, his head slightly bent.

Time had been harsh to him, after all. The furrows it had left on those features so dear to me were like scars. I suddenly felt as if I had never noticed them before, or realised how deep they had become.

"Is that what he said?" reiterated Father. "Don't you think I could see Lenin?"

"That's what he said."

Father was silent, trying to fathom the meaning of Robins's words. He nudged his memory, probably remembering America, the timber trestle bridge he had helped build across the Yukon in 40 below zero. He had laboured on the bridge day and night, trying to finish it before the ice of the river got moving. The ice moved shortly afterwards, but he awoke that night to the tolling of a bell. The scene he saw then was engraved on his memory forever. There was no wind and the flames of the burning bridge seemed to reach to the clouds. The great fire flared to the sky and subsided, for the bridge melted like a candle. He could not come to himself for a long time after that: "What had made people burn that bridge? The savage struggle for gold, or sheer craving for destruction?" He also wondered: "Had the man who set that bridge on fire thought of the people who had built it? Probably he had. Then why had he done it?"

Perhaps, too, he was thinking of an early spring in 1903 when he headed for the Arctic Circle with a few others like himself. Straight across the virgin snow into the depths

of the great white desert marched a party of miners headed by their boss. They were looking for a deserted, almost forgotten mine somewhere in the gloom under the pale sun. The snowy plains looked like hardened lead, or perhaps a great white sheet of zinc that glittered as the sun-rays crossed it. They advanced in two-hour marches, pausing for respites from the slanting wind scorching their faces. A black dot appeared on the horizon on the third day. It seemed as if a vast clean sheet of paper had been marked by a tack at that spot. Something was approaching.... It was a man, just one man. He stood in the middle of the snow-field with arms spread. "You can't go on!" he shouted, barring the way, trying to block the snow-field and the very sky. "I won't let you!" Nor was this at all romantic. His hands were black, and the whites of his eyes were red. That memory, too, was one that would last a lifetime. "Why had that man spread his arms that way? To protect something he had found, or to defend the very earth where he stood, and the land all around? Could that bridge have been burnt to preserve the land from pillage? If so, what was the effort people had put into building it?"

Father sat still, the lines of his face growing harsher.

"We're in the habit of thinking America stands for range of enterprise and risk." He moved the oil lamp nearer, feeling it was not burning brightly enough. "Wide range of enterprise, hmm. But only if it pays.... As for the risk? Well yes, but only if there is no other way out." He lifted the glass from the lamp, turned up the wick and pinched the charred end from it with firm hard fingers unafraid of fire. "What I say is that things can't be so bad with us if America has come to Petrograd at such a time." He fitted the glass back on to the lamp, moving it away. The room grew brighter. "At such a time, mind you!"

That was all he said, but those few words kept me awake all night.

Moving slowly down the long vaulted corridors of Smolny, Robins's powerful figure ahead of me almost blended with the twilight.

We would soon open one of the doors and see Lenin.

But when we reached his door we found it ajar, and the room inside apparently empty. We could see his desk, a massive affair on carved legs. The autumn day outside was dreary, but the lamp on the desk was not lit. Still, I had the impression he had just risen from that desk, for the ink was damp on the sheets of paper covered with his racy handwriting. He was evidently used to working by daylight even on such a dark day as this.

"Why hullo, hullo," said Lenin entering from a side door. "Please come in!" His voice was cheerful. "This way.... You'll be comfortable here...." He indicated the big and roomy armchairs in white dust covers. He switched on the ceiling lights, driving the twilight from the room. "That's better." (*Luchshe* was the Russian word he used.)

"*Luchshe.... Luchshel!*" repeated Robins smiling; he thought he had understood that last word. Turning to me, he added with a worried air: "Would you kindly tell Mr. Lenin.... Yesterday evening I walked along Mokhovaya Street...."

Walking along that street the evening before, he had seen the following. A boy had been trying to sell books written by a supporter of Kerensky. A patrol, two soldiers with red armbands (Robins laid his hand on his arm, above the elbow), came along and took the books away. "That's counter-revolution," they said. (Robins tried to pronounce the word in Russian—"Kontr-revolyutsia!") The boy began to howl and a crowd gathered, all of them shouting at the soldiers, about thirty people. The books were immediately forgotten, of course. Everyone was shouting: "Impostors! Usurpers!" Those soldiers had seemed awfully solitary that evening, all alone, and Robins had wondered who those

two could have represented, if there were thirty against them. Perhaps they really were impostors?

Robins fell silent, regarding Lenin sternly, unsmilingly.

Lenin's brows shifted. He was either considering the essence of what this man had said, or merely sensing the dislike in his tone. The room was quiet. The electric lighting was rather harsh, for there were no shades on the ceiling lamps. The silver pattern of the wall-paper came alive. I felt the talk was going to end before it began.

"You say it happened on Mokhovaya?" asked Lenin without raising his eyes.

"Yes," answered Robins.

"Well," said Lenin—and I could see that his argument had already taken shape, that he had only to put it into words—"well, imagine that this incident involving the patrol had happened, say, at Vasilyevsky, or along the river known as Chernaya Rechka at five o'clock in the evening. There, too, you would have found two versus thirty, but the thirty would have been on the side of. . . ." Lenin touched his arm above the elbow to identify the patrols guarding revolutionary Petrograd.

"But Mokhovaya is in Russia too!" objected Robins.

"Yes, in Russia," said Lenin, "but if you're talking of Russia, you'll not find it on Mokhovaya, but out there. . . ." His eyes went to the window shimmering in the twilight. The Russia he was speaking of lay out there, and he could see it as perhaps no one else had ever seen it before. "Those patrols on Mokhovaya," he went on, "were speaking on behalf of Russia."

Lenin had a characteristic plan for a talk and developed the conversation with his usual firmness and restraint.

It was evening when Robins left Lenin's office.

As previously arranged, I saw him to his car, and returned to Lenin.

"Those bourgeois who have risen from the bottom at least know life," remarked Lenin. I had the impression that

some side of Robins's character had pleased him. "But that's a purely American phenomenon, I think," he mused. "Am I right?"

"Yes," said I.

"Did you really live in America?" he asked. I told him that my family had joined the emigrants moving to America from all parts of the world in 1902.

"Do all of you speak English?" he asked.

"Yes, Vladimir Ilyich," I said, "but my father keeps telling me: 'Don't boast about your English, Mitya. That's no merit. Move Peter's bronze horse from Senate Square in Petrograd to America, to where you were, and he'll talk English too. . . .'"

Lenin brightened.

"No merit, he says? Does your father speak English too?"

"Yes, but he doesn't like to."

"Yours is not a family, but a whole people's commissariat of foreign affairs, eh?"

This was prophetic, for I was soon transferred to a job with the commandant of Smolny, and then to the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs.

The capital moved to Moscow early in the spring of 1918.

Father and I went out to the sidings in the evening. Three trains stood fully loaded and waiting for the signal to start. But their lights were out—a precautionary measure quite justified in those days.

The evening was foggy, but warm. Some patches of snow still lay along the tracks. Puddles of water dimly reflected the ebbing light. Locomotives whistled somewhere far off; it seemed to us that the sounds were muffled for fear of disturbing the stillness of the night. The wind ruffled the grey clouds over the station and beyond, over

Nevsky Prospekt. The sparse light showed only on the faces around us, making them easier to distinguish.

Lenin arrived and walked slowly along the cars, the collar of his autumn coat raised. His gait was slower than usual, for he had recently suffered from a cold. Sverdlov walked at his side.

"Three trains, one behind the other," said Sverdlov.

Lenin paused. Perhaps it was his recent illness, or the twilight that made him seem paler than usual. Mounting a step at the end of one of the cars, he looked far around. I had the feeling he was saying good-bye to Petrograd, and perhaps thanking the great city for its great exploit.

The train rolled off.

Armed workers stood everywhere along the tracks.

I began to walk rapidly towards the station.

"Mitya!" called someone.

I stopped and saw my father. Though in his short sheepskin coat, he seemed cold. He had evidently been standing there for a long time. I saw the snub nose of his old army rifle protruding behind his right shoulder.

"Wait till the third train leaves; then we'll go," he said severely.

We got home towards morning, and the weather was still misty with a drizzle of rain. The tracks were shining. Father and I talked of the trains that had just left for Moscow. We also spoke of Moscow, now the capital, and about Lenin.

"This has been figured out right," mused Father. "The frontier is more and more becoming the firing line. That being the case, why keep headquarters on that line? Lenin has moved the capital where it should be . . . according to all the rules of military science, and not of military science alone."

Father and I moved to Moscow two days later. He found it harder to part with Petrograd than I, but kept soothing himself with the idea that a Petrograd railwayman was a

half Muscovite, and a Moscow railwayman, a half Petrograder, anyway we had lived at Moscow Station in Petrograd, and now we would settle at Nikolayev Station in Moscow. What was a mere five hundred versts, after all? Moreover, the railway school, almost as big as the one in Petrograd, was near, and Father took a job there at once.

Moscow's big hotels, the *National* and the *Metropol* became the government offices.

Lenin lived and worked in the *National*, while the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs established itself at the *Metropol*.

The Kremlin stood nearby. The *Metropol* was only a five minutes walk from the Nikolsky Gate, and ten minutes from the Troitsky Gate. The Smolny schedule was still effective and foreign visitors were received at the oddest times—at noon and at midnight, at sunset, and sometimes even at dawn. Things were made easier by the fact that nearly the entire personnel of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs lived right there, in the hotel.

At the *Metropol* it was Chicherin now who received Raymond Robins more and more frequently. "Our friend, Colonel Robins," was how he referred to him. One day, too, I saw Chicherin and Robins emerge from the hotel together and get into a car. Where were they going? To see Lenin, perhaps. The People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs knew that Robins had been visiting Lenin more and more often.

Lenin liked to talk to Robins, it seemed to me. The man had a sense of humour, a good knowledge of life, and the breadth of vision that always distinguishes the gifted man of the people even when he has amassed a fortune. There was something in Robins reminiscent of the old Urals industrialists, of the Demidovs and Stroganovs, though he was different from them in one way. The Russian industrialists acknowledged neither God nor the devil,

more often than not, while this counterpart of theirs was very pious, fanatically so indeed.... What was there in Lenin to attract him? That was the riddle. Robins, some said, had quarrelled with Francis, the American ambassador in Petrograd, but was fulfilling a mission for him, just the same. Others declared it was his piety that made the Bolsheviks attractive to Robins who was obsessed by the idea of reconciling the Communist Manifesto with the Bible. There were some, too, who had another notion: this millionaire who had sprung from the rural proletariat, they said, was fond of hobnobbing with the head of the first workers' government.

I think Lenin knew of all three views when talking to Robins.

He knew all this, but felt that the man was capable of understanding a great deal in Soviet Russia. Lenin did not intend to convert him, needless to say, but banked on being able to neutralise him, to win his loyalty if possible, or better yet, his friendship. He was certain, in short, that this man who had come to Russia as an enemy could very well depart as her friend, and entered the contest with this in mind. He spoke to Robins about the laws governing wars and revolutions, about the struggle of the classes, the concentration of capital, and the world's division into spheres of influence. Robins sought to explain all riddles by the existence of invisible and mighty forces whose indestructible laws had been set down in the Bible. Lenin could have ignored such arguments that were anything but convincing to a materialist, but took another path instead. Religion, its origin and philosophy came to be their bone of contention for many hours. Lenin spoke as the revolutionary and discoverer. I can well imagine the scope and vehemence of his discourse. He was precisely the revolutionary and discoverer, though to some extent, perhaps, the diplomat defending the interests of the young Soviet state.

All this occurred in the first spring of our revolution, in May 1918. It was a warm and early spring, but a very hungry one—the daily ration was a quarter of a pound of bread; and even that was not available every day.

A phone call instructed me to accompany Robins about to visit Lenin in the Kremlin. Lenin then lived in the narrow Kremlin alley leading from the Borovitsky to the Troitsky Gate. I reached the spot about fifteen minutes ahead of time and saw him come out of that passage. He was walking across the wood-block pavement of the square towards the building of the Council of People's Commissioners. Half-way across he paused for a moment, removed his cap and looked with happy impatience at the sky, filled with sunshine that day.

We entered Lenin's famous Kremlin study known from its many photographs.

Lenin invited Robins to take the armchair at his left, the same low, black-leathered affair that later received all his famous guests from William Bullitt to H. G. Wells.

The fact that Lenin spoke to Robins in English showed that he had grown quite used to his American visitor in the past five months. Later, too, I noted that Lenin usually began with a simple theme, perhaps even personal, to "warm up" for the conversation, to give it spontaneity. Now, too, they were talking about some letters from Florida where Robins had an estate, and also, if I remember correctly, from London where Robins's sister, an actress, lived. Lenin was in no hurry to broach serious topics, giving the impression he was interested in these trifles, and nothing more. Perhaps he was waiting for his guest to begin. He knew Robins had come on business.

"I hope to be in Washington this summer," said Robins, finally. The words evidently concealed something I knew nothing about.

"As I promised," remarked Lenin unhurriedly opening a drawer of his desk, "here's a document that states our

views on trade with America quite fully." He laid an unsealed envelope before Robins and shut the drawer.

Lenin had given Robins a document offering prospects for wide economic ties between our countries, thereby indicating unmistakably that he was to some extent authorising the American to speak on behalf of the Russians. Robins, for his part, had probably anticipated Lenin's words.

It is possible that they had discussed it all at previous meetings. Robins turned pale with excitement, for all that. Opening the flap of the envelope he slowly drew out the paper and held it in both hands.

"I'll do all I can. . . . So help me God! All I can. . . ."

"Why of course, of course," said Lenin with a touch of confusion. Returning to his desk, he reached for his pen.

"So you're going back through Vladivostok?"

"That's right, Vladivostok."

"That's a long trip, and not altogether safe," remarked Lenin looking for his pad with the seal of "Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars". Striking the word "Petrograd" from the form, he quickly inscribed the substitution: "Moscow, Kremlin, May 11, 1918." I was able to read the further words when I handed the document to Robins as we left the study. The message bore the clear instruction "to offer Colonel Robins all possible assistance to travel rapidly and freely from Moscow to Vladivostok." This unique mandate carried the familiar signature: "Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, V. Ulyanov (Lenin)."

I accompanied Robins to the car.

Before getting in, he looked at the sky. It was pale blue and as warm as in summer. He shook hands with me, took another step towards the car, but paused again, turning timid but attentive eyes on the third floor windows, the windows of Lenin's study.

Robins smiled, raised his hands and clenched and unclenched his fists. Lenin stood at his window, smiling back.

The American drove off, and I returned to the study, for Lenin was waiting for me.

"Well, we've sent our message to America!" he said. In his mind's eye he could see Robins travelling through the sea of hills of the Trans-Urals and Siberia, sailing over another, a real ocean, always eastward towards the flat and rocky shores of Oregon and California. "Now I wonder what Rybakov Senior would say to that?" he asked with a smile. "Is your father in Moscow with you, by the way?"

"Yes, Vladimir Ilyich, he is."

"That's fine. . . . He's an old specialist on America. What does he think? Will we get anywhere with America?"

That evening I told my father what Lenin had said.

"Things will come right of their own accord," he answered, as if listening to his own thoughts. "It'll all come right, if only no one stands between us and America. If only all America can hear us, and talk to us. All of it—the ranches, the mines, the prairies, and the automobile plants (he used the English word "plants" for English words still kept popping into his speech from time to time). Yes, and the poor, and perhaps the rich, too. . . ." He was silent an instant, preparing to say something he had thought of long ago: "We may find friends everywhere—and among them too. History is a wise old lady and has given us examples of that before."

The press reported that Robins had safely reached America and had almost been put on trial by a senate committee. He was evidently made of stern stuff, however, for he repulsed the senators, declaring he wanted to talk to the president about wide prospects for economic co-operation between Russia and America. He was obviously referring to Lenin's plan.

The newspapers said the president had refused to receive him.

The main event still lay ahead, though unfortunately after Lenin's death.

Coming to Russia again in the thirties, Robins made straight for the Kremlin, flourishing the mandate Lenin had once given him. On that occasion he declared that he regarded the improvement of Soviet-American relations as the object of his life. This referred to America's recognition of the Soviet Union. Robins was one of those who used his prestige to promote recognition.

Robins, who died a few years ago, remained our friend all his life.

In my innermost thoughts I have often recalled the relations between Lenin and Robins. I have tried to imagine how those relations developed month after month from Robins's first visit to Smolny to his last meeting with Lenin in the Kremlin. Lenin, I think, might have liked Robins simply as a man, for he was charming and colourful in his American way. But that was not all, of course. One might have thought no force on Earth could have turned a bourgeois magnate, a devout Christian, a man who was so rooted in the old world, into a friend of the new. This could have been accomplished only by Lenin's tact and ability. Their relations had stood the test of time, for they had been inspired by an idea both vital and enduring. I also feel this idea should form the keystone of our relations with America, and—I want to look forward—of our friendship with America.



**FRIEND**

left the building a few minutes before midnight. The lights were out in Lenin's study; which meant that he had left. John Reed, too, had gone. The moon had risen across the Moskva River and the belfry of Ivan the Great traced a sinister shadow across the Kremlin's flagstones. Silence stole over the city, accompanied by the chilly breath of greenery and the mists of midnight's darkness. The quiet seemed to be spreading from the narrow path of the Moskva River. The moon was burnishing the dim gold of the cupolas. A voice would have echoed far in this vast silence.

Two figures could be seen on the road where the Kremlin hill descends to the river. The moon had already laid its weightless fingers on their shoulders—they were Lenin and Reed, and the latter was talking. I had previously noticed that he could speak in terms that were at once simple and lofty. The simplicity of his speech stemmed from his maturity and craving to be understood by all. As far as his lofty notes—this probably grew out of his very nature, for he was a poet. Hastening my step, I passed them both. But the closer I came to the Kremlin gate the slower I walked. It seemed as if the animation of those two out there had somehow infected me.

Lenin's choosing to talk to Reed so late at night was not mere chance. It had been the same, I had been told, in Petrograd where the two had met in the room with silver-lilac walls. One half of that room had served as Lenin's study and the other had been partitioned off as his bedroom. Their talk usually began in the study and finished at midnight with a cup of tea on the other side of the partition.

I was about to step from the sidewalk on to the road, when I heard steps behind me. Turning I saw John Reed in the moonlight.

"I've been watching you for about three minutes," he confessed. "Are you in a hurry?"

"No," I said walking slower.

"Then let's go on together."

He was still three steps behind me, making no effort to shorten the distance; and I, too, kept my pace. The moon slid behind the clouds, but I could see Reed quite well. He looked like a worker: his back was broad and slightly bent, and his arms were short and strong. He was dressed plainly too—in a very ordinary grey or dark suit and a white shirt with a turn-down collar unfastened by a button or two. The shirt faintly reflected the dim light of the moon. A gust from the river was touched with the fusty smell of rotting wood. Reed raised his shoulders in a shudder.

"The sky is dark down South now," he said looking up. "And the stars . . . each bigger than a fist." He looked at his own fist and laughed.

"Are you talking of Mexico, the country of General Pancho?" I asked.

"No, why Pancho?" he smiled and raised his fist. "Viva Pancho! Viva Villa!" He was a step ahead of me now, and threw me a slanting glance. "He had a kind heart, you know! It's so important to have a kind heart! As for character—that's more important in such a man than even kindness. It must be, I think."

He was walking alongside now. His slightly protruding eyes and large chin made his face expressive, though a trifle ugly. His eyes, high forehead and lips were pleasant, though his features were out of proportion. These were details one did not care to notice, for he was a handsome man, on the whole.

Reed slackened his pace and stopped.

"Just a minute. Let me catch my breath."

His hand went to his chest.

"Heart trouble?"

"Yes. My heart's in my throat, as the doctors say." He coughed the cautious cough of a man with heart trouble.

"All right! I've caught my breath now." He tried to smile. "Let's go on, but not too fast. What were we talking about?"

We walked on slowly, very slowly. That dry, crackling cough had broken into our talk unwanted, and could have spoiled it beyond repair. But Reed was silent for only a moment.

"There was something missing even in General Pancho. Something important!" stressed Reed. His animation showed that he wanted to talk about Pancho, that anything else meant little to him now.

Reed had once felt that there should have been a second man beside the general: a friend and comrade-in-arms. He did not hesitate to use the word "commissar". Reed had indeed thought that the presence of such a man would be dictated by the course of events, by the logic of life, but had been mistaken, for no such figure appeared. It sometimes seemed to him that the fire of the Revolution was like the furious flames in the bowels of the earth. If they failed to break through at one spot, they would surely force their way through at another.

Silent for a moment, he went on:

"Here's another thing I'd like to say: even before I'd ever heard about Lenin I knew that such a man must come. He simply had to come. I who had seen Pancho realised this very well."

He grew animated again. Pancho and Lenin. The question had been settled as far as he was concerned, but it had been difficult for him to make up his mind. It is hardly likely that the one yielded place to the other in his mind without a struggle. Nothing occurs in life without a struggle. There must have been a time when both principles had attracted him equally and he had not been able to make up his mind which to prefer.

We emerged on Red Square.

"Great events are maturing over there!" His eyes indicated the sky whose eastern edge lay straight ahead. "Lenin said that the banners of liberation are moving eastward." He kept looking ahead. There was no trace of dawn as yet. The sky was dark, seemed even dead, and it was incredible that the black ice of night would thaw first in that part of the sky.

"The East," he reiterated pensively. "Lenin said it would be there. . . . Lenin!"

We said good-bye to each other.

"Are you leaving?" I called to him, as he was walking away.

"Yes, tomorrow."

He was silent, as though weighing those words, but then repeated:

"Tomorrow!"

I watched him walk through the night, saw him cross Red Square. He stopped half-way and looked around, as if he were seeing it for the first time. What did this posture mean? Was he astonished by the unusual aspect of the square—it was especially solemn and beautiful at this late hour—or had he paused to think of where he had got to, and what had brought him here? "The banner of liberation is moving eastward. . . ." Reed stood on the shores of a new sea, facing its turbulent elements. "The banner of liberation. . . ."

Reed left Moscow. Nothing was heard of him for a time. Then came a newspaper note or two. . . . These tidings were scanty, but one tried to fill them in. It was like watching a motor-car moving along a mountain road in the dark. Its lights flash and fade over a ridge hidden by a rocky wall, but then cut through the darkness only to vanish again, and for a long time. But then one sees them once more, not the headlights actually, but their rays lifted to the sky. And finally there is the whole car drifting on, a little ship driven towards the shore by a chance wave.

The days passed as usual. August came to an end and September began. It was still warm in Moscow, but the leaves had changed colour in the parks; the night sky was no longer as bright as in the summer, it seemed deeper, bluer and had more stars, and the winds carried the fragrance of autumn. A telegram arrived from Baku: a congress of the peoples of the East had opened in that city. The whole of the revolutionary East would be sure to be there—some 1,500 delegates. Then came another telegram: Reed had greeted the delegates of the congress (the lights had flashed once more on the ridge).

I could picture Reed ascending the rostrum, replying to the storm of greetings with a wave of his hand. But the hall continued to thunder: "America!" Reed's face grew stricter, the furrow between his eyes deeper and sterner, in contrast to the dimple in his chin. "Comrades..." (now the lights in the mountains had vanished for a long time).

It was evening when I received a phone call from the Kremlin. "Sèvres.... Need information on the Sèvres agreement...." My car descended Kuznetsky and turned into Neglinnaya Street. Dusk was setting in but the street lights had not yet been lit. The lilac tint of the twilight foretold a storm. The air was heavy and the city was steaming hot. Lenin had probably finished his last session. The hour had come when he would switch off the ceiling lights, draw his desk lamp closer, and the green gloom of its shade would spread over his papers, his long shiny scissors and his marble desk set. This was the hour he waited for, the hour when he could form a mental picture of the major and minor affairs of the world. "There's Sèvres.... What made the allies choose that place for negotiations? Wasn't Sèvres once the headquarters of the Kaiser? Is this a demonstration?"

The car rolled into the Kremlin. There was more light here than in the city. Daytime parted with Moscow on the Kremlin hill. But all this light, perhaps, came from the

reflections of the white-walled Kremlin buildings. A white-washed house is always brighter. But evening had already invaded this section, too. It shone in the palace windows mirroring the warm fading twilight. The two large windows of Lenin's study were half dark. The light they shed did not come from the green shade of his desk lamp; it was a quivering, yellow light, as if someone had opened the door of a stove and the glow of the embers was reflected on the walls.

The waiting room was unusually quiet. Though the window was open, the odour of stale tobacco smoke remained from daytime.

"Yes, yes, please come in!"

I had come through that door many a time, and always with the same feeling. My heart always raced as I reached for the knob.

"Ah, the interpreter. . . ."

He could never resist jesting. It was innocuous, but shook the windows with his laughter. Laughter was frequently heard in his study. The massive Kremlin walls were not thick enough to contain that laughter, for it could be heard in the corridor outside, and when the study door was open, in the waiting room, too. The visitors waiting to see Lenin always brightened when they heard him laugh. "Ilyich is laughing," they would say, "and that's a good sign." Those who came to this place, however, knew that it should not be overestimated, good omen though it was. Ilyich was always laughing and always exacting. "Sit down," he said to me now. "A bit nearer." He liked to have people sitting next to him. "What about Sèvres?"

Now I realised where the quivering light came from. The electric lights had been switched off in the Kremlin (this, it appeared, could happen even in the Kremlin after three years of revolution). The stearin candles were lit on Lenin's desk, their steady flames shedding an even light.

"Did I say Sèvres? No, I'm interested in Turkey. What else is known about their reaction to that treaty? No, I don't mean the Turkish press alone. Istanbul! What does Istanbul say? Information. . . . We need extensive information from that country itself. Do you understand?"

He donned his spectacles, an old pair in a thin metal frame, and at once ceased looking like himself. I saw a picture of him in spectacles once, but that was later, much later.

His eyes could sweep through a sheet of small print at an incredible speed. He had his own method of reading, often beginning from the end, for he thought that would give him the gist of the matter quicker. "That affair in Sèvres," he said, "will only hasten developments in the East, you know." He removed his glasses and promptly became the man I had seen in so many photographs. "It will hasten events in the East." He leaned back in his chair, still holding his spectacles. His eyes were fixed on some point in the air. He then arose, his features grave. "I've just had a medical report." He handed me a grey sheet of paper. "John Reed is ill."

For a minute or so there was only silence, except for the sputtering of the stearin candles.

"Typhus, Vladimir Ilyich?"

"Yes."

"Has the crisis passed?"

"No. He's in it now."

Noticing my anguish, he added:

"But he's thirty-three, and that's promising in itself, isn't it?"

In the quiet disturbed only by the sizzling of the candles I could almost hear Reed's cautious heart-trouble cough.

"But his heart, Vladimir Ilyich."

"Heart?"

He arose, took the carafe of water from his desk, and went to the potted palm in the room. This was a habitual gesture when he was worried. He watched the dried earth absorb the water. Picking a pine twig from the tub, he dug up the ground at the trunk, as though trying to help the little tree to drink.

"I had a letter from him only last week," he said, his eyes on the palm tree. "Reed wrote that his wife had just arrived from overseas." He returned to his desk and put the carafe back. "The letter was business-like, of course, except for that detail: from overseas." His voice shook. He was perturbed by Reed's letter, or by something it reminded him of. "Reed," he said in a firmer tone, "will always be dear to us for having understood the main thing. The main thing! And that was not altogether easy for him. Not easy."

I saw a new side of Lenin's character that evening. Trying to explain his attachment for Reed, someone once suggested: "Wasn't Reed Lenin's adviser on American affairs, perhaps?" He was not. There was no need for such an adviser. He was, more likely, a friend and companion. What did Lenin find attractive in him? His love of the new Russia and ability to understand the country? Undoubtedly. His loyalty to the principles of the Revolution? His intellect? This too, of course. But that was not all. A man of active will, Lenin was drawn to a generous heart when he found one in a man, to human affection, solicitude, charm, and all the qualities that keep the blood of man warm.

I took leave of Lenin and returned to my car. I was driving through nocturnal Moscow now. The red pile of the History Museum seemed huddled in the dark. Though they were misty and indistinct, I could see the red bricks even in the black of that starless night. The clouds high above had obliterated the last star. But up there and all around I saw the one anxious word: "Crisis!" The car was

climbing the uneven cobble-stones of Kuznetsky Street. "Crisis, crisis...." A man was facing death under that sky somewhere. He was locked in battle. Everything had faded in him, even his consciousness; only his heart was still beating (the heart is the last to go). All the words he had ever spoken came to his pillow that night: "I'm going to read Joe Hill, listen: 'If I've got to be a soldier, I'll march beneath a red banner....' Tell me.... How did that Russian song begin?.... Just tell me the first words.... I've forgotten.... I've forgotten everything." The words must have crowded in, all of them, but the strength to remember them was ebbing.... My car ascended Kuznetsky Street, higher and higher. I looked at the sky: the clouds parted and closed again. There was a glimmer of light, none of which reached the earth.

Three days later I was summoned to the Kremlin again with a new folder of information regarding the Sèvres agreement. A session of the Council of People's Commissars was in progress. It was after ten o'clock at night and the waiting room was empty. The last visitor had evidently just been invited into the study. His cigarette still lay smoking in the ash-tray. Then I heard the chairs moving back in the room where the session was being held. The door opened and I had a view of Lenin. He was giving some last instructions to the secretaries, answering an unexpected question or two, and offering a few jesting words of encouragement to a comrade who had just been raked over the coals. That moment at the end of his sessions was always the jolliest and noisiest. But all talk suddenly stopped. Lenin stood behind his large desk, looking at a strip of paper lying before him. Someone had handed it to him with a few words just when he was about to leave. He had handed him the message timidly, as though afraid it would hurt him.

"John Reed," said Lenin very distinctly, and perhaps a little louder than usual, "has passed away."

The silence deepened. Everything I could see in that hall, through the open door, even the hazy outlines of clouds beyond the windows, seemed frozen for an instant.

Lenin received me only at midnight, sitting at his desk, his features ashen. He was very tired that day.

"That's the sort of storm Sèvres has raised in the East!" he said, when he finished reading the papers I had brought. "And it's only the beginning." His eyes roamed the great map of Asia on the wall. "It's time the continents arose!" He stood up and approached the map quickly, as he was accustomed to do when engaged in polemics, when a quickly found word could settle the issue. "The East...." His features grew grim and his hand.... But he did not lift his hand. It still lay on the blue patch of the Caspian Sea. "He was a good man," he said quietly. Some association had returned his mind to Reed. "There are laws that guide the peoples to revolution. And Reed knew those laws."

Night. The dim light faintly lit the flag-stones, as I walked across Red Square. I paused at the spot where I had stood with Reed. He had left me here, and gone out to the middle of the square where he had stopped, looking around for a long time. "There are laws that guide the peoples to revolution." Peoples and individuals! John Reed had travelled through the world. He had crossed the oceans and come exactly to this spot, to rest beside the Kremlin wall forever.

Next two pages:

Lenin and Bonch-Bruyevich with a group of employees of the Secretariat of the Council of People's Commissars, Kremlin, Moscow, October 1918





# **Y. DRABKINA**

The author of this story is one of the oldest Communists, a member of the Leninist Party since 1917. Yelizaveta Drabkina worked with many of Lenin's associates in her youth, including Lenin's wife, N. K. Krupskaya. She was personally acquainted with Lenin and witnessed many episodes of his life, later describing them in her book **Black Rusks**. One of the stories from this book is included in this collection.

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**ALYOSHA  
KALENOV'S  
DRAWINGS**

**T**his occurred shortly before the October Revolution. Kerensky's Provisional Government was still in power, but the people were growing more disillusioned day by day. In the elections to the district councils our Party gained a majority in Vyborg District; Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, became head of the cultural-educational department of the Vyborg Council. The department occupied a single room furnished with two crooked old tables and a few chairs.

It was then that Nadezhda Konstantinovna told me that her department was sorely in need of workers, and asked me to establish a children's playground.

My vexation knew no bounds! Here I had been ready almost to build barricades and make a revolution—and she was asking me to wipe the noses of little children.

"That's right!" she countered. "To make a revolution and help the proletariat know who the Bolsheviks are, you and I shall have to do all sorts of work, including wiping children's noses. The Vyborg District Council," she went on, "is so far the only one in which our Party has influence: and we've got to show the workers of Petrograd and all Russia how the Bolsheviks will work once the proletariat has taken power into its own hands."

Finishing her work for the day, Nadezhda Konstantinovna left the office with me to look for a suitable site for the playground. We walked about for a long time until we finally discovered a large empty lot overgrown with grass near a railway bridge. This would be the best place we thought, since there was a fence around the lot and a wooden shed inside.

We cleared it of dirt and weeds with the aid of some young Vyborg workers, brought a lot of sand to the place, as well as a dozen toy shovels, a ball, four skipping ropes, several packets of white paper, and sets of water-colours and crayons. Our posters went up all over the district, inviting the children to come to their new playground.

The opening of the playground was announced for ten o'clock, but the fence was surrounded with children by eight, all of them eager to see the miracle inside.

Nor did they all come in when I opened the gate. No more than thirty ventured to enter; and these were timid, afraid to be reprimanded and shouted at wherever they moved.

I gave them the toys and set the smallest down in the sand. These little old folk thawed and grew cheerful, bit by bit. They might have looked like ordinary children to the casual spectator. But if you approached one of the little girls playing mama to a stick of wood wrapped in rags, you might hear her muttering:

"Don't cry, Varka! You're breaking my heart! Wait till I get my pay. I'll buy some potatoes then, cook a whole pot-full, and you'll eat it all by yourself, like a queen!"

It began to rain, and I gathered the children in the shed and set them to drawing; we had enough paper and brushes, fortunately.

I collected the drawings when the rain was over. Some you could not make head or tail of. Others depicted houses with smoke corkscrewing from the chimneys, and flat people with outspread arms and legs. But there were two sheets covered with pictures that surprised me. They were done by a little boy called Alyosha Kalenov.

Nearly each reiterated the same theme: there were bright splashes of paint at the bottom, vivid and motley enough to suggest fantastic birds. Above these—in every picture—was an accurate muddy-blue square, seemingly suspended in the air. All this, moreover, had been drawn with surprising expressiveness not at all childish.

I knew that the patches of colour were flowers, Alyosha told me they were. But why were those flowers so strange? And what was the meaning of that queer square in each drawing?

Somehow, I could not ask him, he was the sort of little person who might be crushed by such a question. I decided to ask Nadezhda Konstantinovna's advice.

Alyosha's drawings moved her, too. There was nothing I could tell her about the boy, but I had the registration book and found his address.

"Go to his house," said Nadezhda Konstantinovna. "See how he lives. We might understand a lot then."

So off I went again through the dreary streets of Vyborg District. Everything was so bare around, not a tree, or a shrub. At last I found the weather-worn six-storey house that could have sprung from a Dostoyevsky novel. This was where Alyosha Kalenov lived. The courtyard was like the bottom of a well. A worn stairway of crumbling steps at the far end led down to a cellar, a long dark hallway with a door at the end.

When I knocked, it opened by itself, revealing a narrow room with a single window. Three little children were sleeping under a torn patchwork quilt. Alyosha Kalenov sat by the window. I smiled to the boy, came over, sat down beside him, and looked through the window. High above I saw the muddy blue patch of sky he had put into every one of his drawings.

This little boy who I thought was about ten years old turned out to be over twelve. He had never been outside Vyborg District, and had never seen a flower. He imagined flowers to be indescribably beautiful, and was even sure that they could sing....

His father had been conscripted on the first day of the war. A notice of his death was received soon afterwards. His mother was a washerwoman, slaving from morning till night to feed her four children. Alyosha did not go to school, but took care of the smaller children.

I told Nadezhda Konstantinovna about all this. She listened silently, tears running down her cheeks, and her lovely hands trembling on the desk. Next day she sent

me a message, saying I must visit Vladimir Ilyich at Kshesinskaya's palace in the evening, and take Alyosha's drawings with me.

It was late before I managed to reach the palace. Crowds were seething inside and all around: news had just arrived of the disgraceful failure of the offensive launched on the instigation of Kerensky, an adventure that had cost the lives of many soldiers. The workers of Petrograd were fuming with hatred for the Provisional Government.

Vladimir Ilyich received me in a corner room on the second floor. One of its windows faced the Neva River, and the other, the Peter and Paul Fortress.

When I came in he sat writing at a desk littered with newspapers and books. The windows were open, and through them came the hubbub of the crowds, like a throbbing surf on a distant shore.

Before saying anything, he poured tea for both of us from a blue enamelled teapot in a corner. He set a saucer of granulated sugar and a plate with some slices of black bread on the desk. There was very little sugar, and we sprinkled it on our bread as we drank the tea, having what Vladimir Ilyich called "sugar sandwiches".

Then I brought out Alyosha's drawings which Vladimir Ilyich studied for a long time.

"There you are!" he said angrily, gesturing at the rose tapestry and marble ceiling. "Alyosha Kalenov had to be deprived of his childhood so that the tsar's mistress could live in this luxury."

Reaching for a sheet of paper, he proceeded to jot down everything that had to be done for the children at my playground: "They must (and he underlined the word twice) be taken for an outing out of town at least once; they must (again he underlined the word twice) be taken to the Summer Garden ("and let the upper class children make room for them a bit"). Games and balls have to be found for them. Talk to Gorky about some children's books.

We've got to ask the Vyborg people if they could dig some beds and plant some flowers in the playground."

On the next morning Vladimir Ilyich left for Finland for a week. He took Alyosha's drawings and his notes with him, saying he wanted to see the boy when he came back.

But the events of July 3, 4 and 5 came soon after. Vladimir Ilyich immediately returned to Petrograd, but then had to hide from arrest and persecution by the Provisional Government. His papers, including Alyosha's drawings, were lost.

Changing his hiding place several times, Vladimir Ilyich at last reached the hay-field of the Sestroretsk worker-Bolshevik, Nikolai Alexeyevich Yemelyanov, and hid in a shanty there. Nadezhda Konstantinovna continued her work with the Vyborg District Council in those harrowing months. She seemed as serene as always, but even my unpractised eye could see what an enormous effort that outward calm was costing her.

I was sure that Vladimir Ilyich had no time to think of us, and had forgotten all the things he had wanted to do for the children of my playground. At the end of July, therefore, I was all the more surprised when Nadezhda Konstantinovna told me to gather the children on Sunday for an outing to Mustamaki.

"What about the money for the tickets?"

"That won't be necessary. Everything has been arranged."

It was just as she said, for an empty coach stood waiting for us at the Finland Station; it had been put there by our railwaymen comrades. They coupled the coach to the first train scheduled to leave, and off we went, shouting and laughing.

In Mustamaki we were received by the old Party worker Alexander Mikhailovich Ignatyev. The children were mustered in fours, and one of the boys (not by chance,

of course) turned out to have a piece of bunting which he promptly attached to the end of a stick. We marched off to a house in the locality, our red banner flying. Waiting for us there were generous portions of delicious millet porridge, sweet tea with milk, and oatcakes.

All this was being done for us thanks to Vladimir Ilyich! And this though his own position was dreadful at that time—he was all alone, in a forsaken shanty, knowing he could be arrested and torn limb from limb at any moment, labouring over his articles, books, and pamphlets from morning till night, concentrating on the destiny of Russia and the international workers' movement. At such a time he had taken steps to present some fifty proletarian children with a day of happiness!

We spent that happy day bathing, walking in the woods, and singing. The smallest children rolled about in the tall grass, and our little girls wove wreaths of flowers.

Alyosha Kalenov alone kept roaming about as in a spell, looking at the flowers, touching the petals tenderly.

Ignatyev agreed that we must surely come again, but the stormy political events prevented this. The general situation in the country grew more tense every day. An open campaign was unleashed against the red district of Vyborg. The bourgeois newspapers demanded an end to this "Bolshevik nest". When I reminded my comrades about the things the playground needed, they sighed, scratched their heads, looked at me guiltily, but could do nothing.

September was approaching, and the children had to be transferred to a place under a roof, but we had neither the premises nor the money for this. There were other things on our minds, besides, for the entire proletarian youth was doing its utmost to help the Party to prepare for the October offensive.

I blush to think that I quite forgot about Alyosha Kalenov in those days. I felt terribly awkward when I ran into Vladimir Ilyich in a corridor of Smolny after the

October Revolution and he at once asked me about Alyosha Kalenov. I could not tell him anything about the boy.

"How's that?" he demanded. "The fate of that family was in your hands, so to speak, and you've forgotten them!"

"Yes, I . . ."

"Go to the commandant's office and tell the comrades that I want them to see that the Kalenov family is moved to a good flat.

I visited the Kalenovs in their new home a few days later. Hardly able to believe her luck, Maria Vasilyevna Kalenova kept wandering about the luxurious study of the oil magnate Gukasov who had fled abroad, cautiously resetting the delicate porcelain knick-knacks with her washerwoman's swollen hands. As for Alyosha, he seemed oblivious to everything except a sketch of Vrubel's *Daemon* on the wall.

By the end of November we at last received the premises for our children's club—three rooms in the mansion which the great Russian poet Nekrasov had in mind when he wrote his poem *The Main Entrance*.

Gathered at the main entrance now, however, were not the harassed village messengers brow-beaten by haughty lackeys, but Petrograd workers and their children. Intensive activities began. Firewood was stacked, the floors were washed, and the furniture was rearranged to suit our needs. This former home of a high tsarist official was turned into Petrograd's first children's club. It was called "The World Revolution Club for Workers' Children". The children did all the work at the club themselves—kept the place clean, split logs for firewood and stoked the stoves.

I went to Moscow in March 1918, but returned to Petrograd for May Day. Standing beside the platform on the Victims of the Revolution Square, I saw the youngsters of our children's club file by. They were carrying a large

placard depicting a worker in a red shirt. Offering one hand to a peasant, he was swinging a heavy hammer in the other, smashing the chains capital had thrown round the world. The words on the placard read: "Beware, world bourgeoisie, for we are on guard!" Alyosha Kalenov ran up to me just then, happily shouting that he had drawn that placard himself.

During my next visit to Petrograd, in the summer of 1920, I learned that the Komsomol Alexei Kalenov had volunteered for a detachment which was sent to the front, and had died the death of a hero, fighting against the bands of Yudenich near Pulkovo.

Lenin, Krupskaya and Maria Ulyanova, Stepan Chil at the wheel.  
Moscow, May 1, 1918





# STEPAN GHIL

Stepan Ghil's recollections hold a special place among stories about Lenin. Having been Lenin's chauffeur, Stepan Ghil was in close contact with the great leader of the revolution for six years (1917-24) and witnessed many episodes of his life.

Now an old-age pensioner, Stepan Ghil is the author of the book *Six Years with V. I. Lenin*, an excerpt from which is included in this collection.

**ATTEMPT  
ON LENIN'S  
LIFE**

It was 1918, an anxious period for Soviet Russia leading the feverish, very tense existence of a country in the first year of the greatest revolution the world had ever known.

Those were the times when Vladimir Ilyich drove out to mass meetings almost every day. They were held in the open air at plants and factories, out on the squares, or where the troops were stationed. Lenin often addressed two or three such meetings a day.

Those meetings could be attended by anyone: the gates of the enterprises where they took place stood wide open. Huge placards on those gates, moreover, hospitably invited everybody to attend the meeting where Lenin was scheduled to speak.

Vladimir Ilyich ran deadly risks several times a day. The danger was aggravated by the fact that he stubbornly refused to have a body-guard. He carried no arms himself (except for a tiny Browning which he never once fired), and asked me not to carry any arms, either. Noticing a holstered revolver at my belt one day, he gently but firmly demanded:

"What do you need that thing for, Comrade Ghil? Put it away, as far as you can!"

I kept carrying that revolver, for all that. To keep it out of Vladimir Ilyich's sight I had it tucked into a belt under my shirt.

Vladimir Ilyich and I made several trips on the fateful day of August 30, 1918. We had already attended a meeting at the grain exchange. We left the exchange at about six in the evening and headed for the former Michelson plant on Serpukhovskaya Street. We had been to this plant several times before.

The meeting had not yet begun when we drove into the premises of the Michelson plant. Everybody was waiting for Lenin. Thousands of people had gathered in the spacious grenade shop. But it happened that no one came

out to meet us: no members of the factory committee, nor anyone else.

Vladimir Ilyich stepped out of the car and hurried towards the shop, while I swung the car round to face the courtyard's exit, some ten paces from the entrance of the shop.

Minutes later I was approached by a woman in a short jacket; she had a brief-case in her hand. I had a good look at her, for she came right up to the car. She was young, thin, and her wild dark eyes created the impression that she was not altogether sane. She was pale, and her voice noticeably quivered when she asked:

"Lenin has arrived, hasn't he, comrade?"

"I don't know who has arrived," I answered.

To which she laughed nervously, saying:

"That's funny! You're the chauffeur and don't know whom you've brought."

"How do I know? Some orator or other. Lots of them use this car. Who could remember them all?" I said quietly.

I always kept to the strict rule never to tell anyone who had arrived, where we had come from, and where we were going.

She left with a sarcastic twist of the mouth, and I saw her enter the plant.

"What did she want?" I wondered. "Why was she so persistent?" But there were often many who kept asking whom I had brought in the car. Sometimes they would surround the car on all sides; that is why I promptly forgot the woman's behaviour and what she had said.

A large crowd came into the open within about an hour. Mostly workers, they filled the yard. The meeting was evidently over, and I quickly started the car. Vladimir Ilyich was not yet in sight.

When a second throng came out of the plant, headed by Vladimir Ilyich, I took hold of the wheel and shifted into gear to be able to move at any moment.

Approaching the car, Vladimir Ilyich kept up a lively conversation with the workers. They were asking many questions. He responded to each with friendly interest, answering in detail, sometimes putting a question of his own. He approached the car very slowly, pausing two or three steps away. Someone in the crowd opened the door for him.

The conversation lasted for two or three minutes. Two women in the throng stood next to Lenin, one on each side. He was about to cover the last steps to the running-board when a shot rang out.

I was looking at Vladimir Ilyich at that instant but at once turned my head and saw the woman who had questioned me an hour before. She stood on the left of the car, beside the mud-guard and was aiming at Vladimir Ilyich's chest.

Another shot rang out. I stopped the engine, snatched my revolver from my belt, and lunged for her. Her arm was extended: she was about to fire again, and I raised my pistol to her head. She noticed this, and her hand shook as she fired a third time. The last bullet struck the shoulder of one of the women who had stood beside Lenin, as was later established.

I was about to shoot, but the criminal who had fired at Lenin hurled her Browning at my feet, turned swiftly and was lost in the crowd as she ran towards the exit. There were people all around, and I was afraid to fire, afraid I would hit one of the workers.

Darting after her, I ran a few paces and stopped. "What about Vladimir Ilyich?" I gasped. "How is he?" There was an ominous silence for some seconds. Then came the cry on all sides: "They've killed him! They've killed Lenin!" The whole crowd swept in pursuit of the murderer and the resulting crush was fearful. Turning towards the car I was horrified: Vladimir Ilyich lay on the ground about two steps from the car. I leapt to his side. The yard was

emptied in those seconds. The assassin had got away in the crowd.

I knelt beside Lenin. What luck! He was alive. He had not even lost consciousness.

"Did they catch him?" he asked quietly, evidently thinking his assailant had been a man.

He spoke with difficulty. His voice was changed, strangely hoarse.

"Don't talk!" I said, "It's hard for you."

Looking up at that instant, I saw a man in a sailor's cap running towards us from the shop. He was waving his left hand, and his right was in his pocket. On he came, heading straight for Vladimir Ilyich.

The man seemed highly suspicious to me, and I covered Vladimir Ilyich with my body, especially his head. I was nearly lying on him.

"Halt!" I shouted at the top of my voice, pointing my pistol at him.

He kept coming, and I shouted again.

"Halt! Or I shoot!"

Some paces away he wheeled to the left and ran off towards the gates, his hand still in his pocket.

Meanwhile a woman came running up from behind, screaming, "What are you doing? Don't shoot!"

She evidently thought I was going to shoot Vladimir Ilyich.

Before I could answer, someone shouted from the direction of the shop, "He's one of us! One of us!"

I saw three men running towards me with pistols in their hands.

"Halt!" I yelled. "Who are you? Halt, or I shoot!"

"We're the factory committee, comrade!" they answered.

Looking them over, I recognised one of them. I had seen him during our trips to the plant before. The three came up to Vladimir Ilyich. All this happened very quickly, in one or two minutes.

One of the three insisted that I take Vladimir Ilyich to the nearest hospital, but I refused:

"No! I'm not taking him to any hospital. I'm going to take him home!"

Vladimir Ilyich heard the talk, and urged, "Home, home!"

The comrades of the factory committee—one of them belonged to the military commissariat—helped me to raise Vladimir Ilyich to his feet. Supported on each side, he was able to walk the remaining distance to the car. We lifted him on to the running-board and he sank into his usual place in the back seat.

Before taking my place at the wheel, I turned to look at Lenin. He was pale, and his eyes were half-closed. It wrung my heart to see him so quiet and crushed. A lump rose in my throat. He was especially dear to me at that moment in the way a person you love is especially dear when you are about to lose him forever.

But this was no time for reflection. I had to act quickly. Lenin's life had to be saved!

Two of the factory committee got into the car: one beside me, and the other next to Vladimir Ilyich. I drove to the Kremlin as fast as I could.

I looked round at Vladimir Ilyich several times on the way. About midway to the Kremlin he sank back against the seat, but did not moan or make any other sound. His face was growing whiter. The comrade beside him kept him upright. Approaching the Troitsky Gate I did not stop, merely shouting to the sentries: "Lenin!" I headed the car straight for Vladimir Ilyich's flat.

To avoid the attention of the people standing about or passing the house where Vladimir Ilyich lived, I drew up at a side-door, beyond an arch.

The three of us helped Vladimir Ilyich out of the car. He was obviously in pain.

"We'd better carry you up, Vladimir Ilyich," I suggested.

But this he flatly refused.

We began to plead with him, saying it was hard and harmful for him to move, especially upstairs, but nothing could change his mind.

"I'll walk," he said firmly. Turning to me, he added: "Just take my jacket off. It will be easier that way."

Very cautiously I helped him out of his jacket; and leaning on us, he mounted the steep stairs to the third floor. He ascended silently, emitting not so much as a sigh. We were met on the stairs by Maria Ilyinichna, and conducted Vladimir Ilyich straight to his bed.

Maria Ilyinichna was highly agitated.

"Telephone at once! Hurry!" she begged me.

Whereupon Vladimir Ilyich opened his eyes, quietly saying:

"There, there.... Nothing's happened, really.... I've been hurt in the arm a little."

From the next room I phoned Bonch-Bruyevich, the administrative manager of the Council of People's Commissars, and told him what had happened. He hardly heard me out, for every second was precious, and something had to be done.

People's Commissar for Social Security, Vinokurov, came to Lenin's flat from a session of the Council of People's Commissars. Bonch-Bruyevich, too, soon arrived.

Vladimir Ilyich lay on his right side, moaning feebly. His shirt had been cut to expose his chest and left arm. Two small wounds were visible in his upper arm, and Vinokurov painted them with iodine.

Vladimir Ilyich's eyes opened full of pain. Looking about, he said:

"It hurts; my heart hurts...."

Vinokurov and Bonch-Bruyevich tried to soothe him:

"Your heart has not been touched. The wounds are only in your arm. That's a nervous, reflected pain."

"Can you see the wounds? In my arm?"

"Yes."

He closed his eyes, and began to moan in about a minute, very quietly, as though afraid to trouble us.

His face grew whiter still, his forehead turning a wax-like shade. All who stood around were seized with fear: was Vladimir Ilyich departing forever? Was this the end?

Bonch-Bruyevich phoned the Moscow Soviet, asking the delegate on duty and whoever else was about to go for the doctors at once. "Go at once and fetch Obukh, Weisbrod, and a surgeon!" he told them. Someone was also sent off to fetch a container of oxygen, to find one among the Moscow chemists' shops. No first-aid station had been set up in the Kremlin as yet: there was neither a chemist's nor a hospital, and everything had to be fetched from the city.

Yakov Mikhailovich Sverdlov telephoned: he had just learned that Vladimir Ilyich had been wounded. Bonch-Bruyevich briefly told him what had happened and asked him to invite a good surgeon at once. Yakov Mikhailovich said he would send for Professor Mints. Soon he arrived at Lenin's flat himself.

Maria Ilyinichna begged me to break the news very gently to Nadezhda Konstantinovna. She was at the People's Commissariat of Education at the time, and had not heard of the misfortune. I left the house, but was overtaken by someone from the Council of People's Commissars. He wanted to go with me, to help me tell Nadezhda Konstantinovna what had happened.

We decided to wait for her in the courtyard, and she soon arrived. My face must have told her that something awful had happened, for she stopped, looked me straight in the eyes, saying:

"Don't say anything! Just tell me: is he alive or dead?"

"I give you my word of honour that Vladimir Ilyich has been only lightly wounded," I assured her.

She stood very still for a second, and then went up-

stairs. We followed her to Vladimir Ilyich's bedside. He was unconscious now.

Vera Mikhailovna Velichkina, Bonch-Bruyevich's wife who was a doctor, arrived. Feeling Vladimir Ilyich's pulse, she administered a morphine injection and said no one must touch him until the surgeons arrived, but his shoes should be removed, and he should be undressed as far as possible.

It so happened that a phial of ammonia being handed around was suddenly dropped and broke on the floor. The room was quickly filled with the acrid odour, and Vladimir Ilyich suddenly came to.

"That's good," he said, slipping into forgetfulness again. The ammonia had evidently refreshed him, while the morphine had dulled his pain.

Professor Mints turned up, greeted no one, and went to Vladimir Ilyich's bedside at once.

"Morphine!" he snapped, examining Lenin's face.

"I've given him an injection already," answered Vera Mikhailovna.

Wearing his white smock, Professor Mints measured the distance between the two wounds in Vladimir Ilyich's arm with his fingers. Reflecting briefly, he continued to feel Lenin's arm and chest with his swift flexible hands. He seemed puzzled now.

The room was very still; we hardly dared to breathe. What would the professor say? Mints meanwhile kept murmuring:

"One is in his arm. . . . Where's the other? The large vessels are untouched. But I can't find the other. Where did it go?"

His eyes were suddenly fixed in a stare, his features hardening. Starting back, he turned pale. Feverishly his hands sought Vladimir Ilyich's neck.

"Here it is!"

He pointed to the right side of the neck. The other doctors in the room exchanged looks. Many things were clear now. The silence was unbearable. All realised that something dreadful had happened, something fatal, perhaps. Mints was the first to recover.

"Put the arm on cardboard! Isn't there any cardboard?"

A sheet was duly found, and Mints quickly cut a suitable pattern, laying the wounded arm on it.

"He'll be easier that way," he explained.

I soon left Lenin's flat. Though he was badly wounded and his condition was very grave, I tried to console myself with the thought that the doctors would help, that he had a strong constitution and his heart was sound. I simply refused to allow the thought of his death to creep in.

Within two or three days it was definitely known that Vladimir Ilyich would live.

Some of the details of the attempt on Lenin's life came to light on the very first evening.

Fanny Kaplan, the woman who had fired at him, belonged to a gang of Socialist-Revolutionary terrorists. The same gang had taken the lives of Uritsky and Volodarsky in Petrograd.

After firing at Vladimir Ilyich the assassin fled through the gates of the plant with the crowd. The people running about her did not at first know who had fired at Lenin. Mixing with them, the terrorist hoped to get away unnoticed. A horse and carriage stood in a street near the plant, but she was never to reach it, for the children who had been in the yard during the attempted assassination swarmed after her, shouting and pointing:

"There she is! There she is!"

The terrorist was seized thanks to those youngsters. She was caught beside a tram-car switch point and brought back to the yard of the plant. The crowd was enraged. Many infuriated workers tried to reach her. They would

no doubt have killed her if not for a group of workers who held back the crowd. Someone kept shouting:

"What are you doing, comrades? She's got to be questioned!"

Within an hour Kaplan was placed in the hands of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Suppression of Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation.

The man in the sailor's cap, who had run towards Vladimir Ilyich after he had been shot down by Kaplan, was quickly arrested too, for he turned out to be an accomplice of the terrorist.

Lenin's strong constitution and the exceptional care he received during his convalescence proved effective, for he was back, presiding over the sessions of the Council of People's Commissars, in two or three weeks.

A few months later Vladimir Ilyich, completely recovered and cheerful as ever, again addressed the workers at the Michelson plant. The joy of the workers knew no bounds. The first question they shouted to Lenin was:

"How do you feel, Vladimir Ilyich?"

"Fine, thank you!" he answered smiling.

Then the meeting began.

# I. A R A M I L E V

The well-known Soviet writer Ivan Aramilev (1896-1951) was born and raised in a family of hunters in the North Urals. His book **The Hunter's Trail** is especially popular. The story "Recreation", included in this book, was set down by the author from the words of the old hunter I. V. Alyabyev, who told the writer of the most remarkable incident in his life, the time he went shooting with Lenin.

**RECREATION**

**T**he message reached Ivan Vasilyevich Alyabyev at night. The old hunter was being summoned to the Uyezd Executive Committee. When the messenger had gone, Maria Petrovna, the hunter's wife, regarded him with worried eyes.

"What's this about, Ivan?"

"There's something, I suppose, if they're calling me."

His voice was steady, but he lit the lamp for some reason and began combing his tangled grey beard. The old woman stirred uneasily on her cot and sighed.

The kerosene was poor and the wick of the lamp began to smoke. Ivan reduced the flame, lay down on his bunk, but could not fall asleep for a long time.

Donning his Sunday boots and a new brightly coloured shirt in the morning, he set off for town on foot. It was pleasant to walk in the shade. The quail sang in the wheat and young rooks shouted among the birches. Ivan listened to the din with an unhappy smile.

"That's how birds live," he thought. "They don't sow or reap, but have plenty to eat all year round, without a care in the world. Yes, and now I've been summoned!"

There was a long queue in the chairman's ante-room: peasants from afar, city folk, suburban gardeners, and recently demobilised Red Army men in peaked caps with a star in front.

When the secretary asked everybody about his business, Ivan Alyabyev named himself and extended the message he had received. The girl examined him sharply.

The door of the chairman's office swung open in a moment, and as though through a haze the old man heard the secretary's voice ring out:

"Come in, Comrade Alyabyev."

The chairman, an elderly clean-shaven man, offered Ivan his hand and motioned him to an armchair. The old hunter settled gingerly.

"Still hunting?"

"A little, sometimes," answered the hunter. "I've grown old, you know." He did not know what was wanted of him yet, but felt it was best to seem humble and unfortunate. "My eyes aren't too good any more, and my legs—well, rheumatism! I'll have to stop hunting soon, I suppose."

"I see," said the chairman vaguely, but fixing the old man with his clever piercing eyes. "You're old, you say? But I think you're as well and strong as a man can be. There's a man coming for some shooting, you see, and we've picked you as his guide. Wait for him at home tomorrow. When he comes, show him round to the best places."

"I could do that," agreed the old man. "I've done it before. Could you tell me who's coming?"

The chairman smiled.

"You'll see when he comes. Just take my advice, friend! Don't say anything about this in the village.

Alyabyev grew wary.

"It's a secret!"

"Secret or not, there's no point in blabbing about it. The peasants will come running with all sorts of questions, and he's got to have a rest."

"I understand," Ivan nodded.

The telephone rang just then, and the chairman lifted the receiver.

While he was talking, Ivan, now greatly relieved, recalled how famous he had once been all over the region. The officials had often given him their dogs to train and had gone shooting with him. Everybody then had marvelled at his marksmanship, his knowledge of the woods, of the ways and habits of animals and birds. Even

the highest of the gentry had called on him now and then:

"Take us to the woods. We want a bit of shooting!"

And he had done as he was told. Those gentlemen had been high-handed, paying next to nothing for his services, but he had been happy, just the same. He had been shooting with people richly dressed, sporting expensive guns and pedigree dogs. Even his neighbour Nikita Pankov, a vicious, evil-tongued muzhik who disliked Ivan, could not help envying him on such days.

On one occasion, true enough, a Zemstvo official had struck him across the face with a twig for some slight mistake at the shoot. On another, an officer, bent on what he thought was fun, made Ivan drink half a gallon of vodka at one go, right there in the woods. Ivan again had done as he was told, drinking until he lost his senses and nearly had a heart attack. This was something his neighbours did not know about, of course, for it was hardly the thing the old man would boast about.

The war came, and then the revolution. Powder and shot was not to be bought anywhere. Ivan Alyabyev had begun to fear he would never be a guide again, that no one needed him any more. But they had remembered him, after all! He could hardly hide his exultation.

The chairman, meanwhile, finished his telephone conversation and turned to Ivan.

"Well? Do you agree? Take your gun along, but don't do any shooting yourself no matter where the game! On no account! Your job is to see that the birds come his way. He doesn't like to have anyone else kill his game for him and shove it into his bag. He'll shoot as much as he wants. If he bags nothing, he won't mind in the least."

"Don't worry," said the hunter. "I'll do as you say. I know where all the coveys are, too."

Ivan Alyabyev kept looking cheerfully around on his

way back, often pausing to puff at his extinguished pipe.

"I wonder who's coming? All the way from Moscow, too!"

Maria Petrovna brightened when Ivan told her an important guest was expected. She set to work at once, washing the floor, brushing the cobwebs from the corners, making the cottage spick and span.

The dusty car drove up towards evening. At the touch of the chauffeur's horn, Alyabyev came out on the porch, smiling happily.

"Welcome! Please come in!"

A stocky man in a brown jacket and top-boots emerged from the car, a gun-case in his right hand.

"How do you do?" he said gently.

Ivan Alyabyev was confused for an instant, for he had assumed the eager, ready expression with which he had formerly greeted his superiors, but this guest had replied with the friendliest of smiles. That smile immediately drew the two together.

The driver eased the car into the yard, while the guest sat down on the small mound of earth against the cottage wall and wiped his face with a handkerchief. Ivan could not take his eyes off him. A herd of cattle came slowly down the road, the herdsman cracking his long whip behind the large well-fed animals. The guest looked at the cows, the neat cottages of the village, and the clear blue sky.

Ivan's eyes widened. "That's him, no one else!" He had seen those features, that prominent forehead in the newspapers and many pictures. Of course it was he!

"Aren't you Comrade Lenin?"

"Right you are," answered Vladimir Ilyich. "And your name is Ivan Vasilyevich, I think?"

"That's right, Vladimir Ilyich!" exclaimed the old hunter joyously. Swinging about he nearly swept his wife off her feet.

"Quick, mother! It's Lenin himself who's come! The Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. What do you think of that!"

"Oo!" Maria Petrovna was doubtful.

"If I say so, it's so! And don't let your tongue run away with you!"

Alyabyev wheeled again, making for the porch.

"A cup of tea, Vladimir Ilyich? Or some milk fresh from the cow?"

"Thanks," said Lenin. "I wouldn't refuse a cup of tea."

Lenin said little while they sat around the samovar. His long drive had evidently tired him. He only asked about the game in the region, listened attentively to the hunter's answers, and then asked for a bed in the hay-loft.

After conducting his guest to the barn filled with fresh hay, Alyabyev retired to his bunk. A strenuous day lay ahead, and he needed a good night's rest. Yet sleep he could not, for he was worrying about tomorrow's hunt. What if he didn't prove up to the mark? He had not been to the forest for some days and was not sure where the birds were to be found.

At the first glimmer of dawn Lenin and Alyabyev followed a barely perceptible path through the orchards into the fields. The village was fast asleep, and its single street was very still. The air was rich with the fragrance of apples. Ivan strode ahead, though Lenin paused now and then to look across the cornfields.

They could hear the metallic voices of two swans flying past some distance away. Vladimir Ilyich caught the sound of their mighty wings and his hand moved for his gun in spite of himself. The hunter noticed the motion, and remarked:

"They're too far, Comrade Lenin."

"I know," smiled Lenin. "And it would be a pity to shoot, anyway. . . . They're lovely birds."

The red setter Axai darted ahead, but Alyabyev called to him quietly, and the dog returned obediently to heel. The breeze was warm and fragrant, and the paling darkness suddenly melted, revealing a green birch grove on the right and a shining river in broad water-meadows on the left. A shot rang out somewhere.

Ivan looked sharply round.

"What if we took to the stream, Vladimir Ilyich? I've got a boat, and the duck are plentiful this season."

"That would be fine," agreed Lenin.

They turned towards the bank. It was a joy to walk through the dewy grass, but the path seemed long, for both were impatient now.

More shooting could be heard further down the valley, one after the other and the wild duck rose uneasily over the marshes.

"That's the village folk firing away," said Ivan. "The season opens today. They always start shooting at the break of dawn the first day. No sportsman can stay home on such a day. They all come out—even the one-eyed and the crippled!"

When they had descended to the river Alyabyev untied a flat-bottomed boat, fixed the oars in place, but then sniffed the air suspiciously.

"It'll rain by evening."

The setter leapt into the boat and lay on the bottom with a proprietary air. Vladimir Ilyich sat at the stern

as Ivan pushed off, and the boat drifted along the bank, leaving a shining wake dimpled by the plashing oars. Lenin looked around: the hills on the other side were rosy in the morning sun, and the river lay still in a thin luminous mist.

"Keep your gun cocked, Vladimir Ilyich," advised the hunter. "The duck have been raised everywhere and may fly over at any moment. This boat of mine is steady, so take your time."

Vladimir Ilyich broke his gun open and inserted the cartridges. The stream was a tortuous one, overgrown with reeds in the middle. Ivan pushed the boat into the rushes and tied it up. The village hunters hidden amid the green willows on both banks were the ones who had neither boats nor dogs.

Most of them had had a drink or two, since this was Sunday and the first day of the season. Their voices could be heard all over the river, but all fell promptly silent when the ducks flew over. Several shots were fired from the bushes and a bird or two fell, while the flock darted aside, winging to greater heights. Only one bird with a bluish grey chest ignored the shots and continued fishing. Steering an erratic course over the stream with his forked tail, he would plunge suddenly for his prey, the exploded water falling away under him in circles.

Another flock of duck came into view and Vladimir Ilyich let fly with both barrels. One of the birds fell near the boat, while another parted from the others and began to flutter down.

"That one's finished, too!" said the hunter. "A good beginning, Vladimir Ilyich!"

A shot suddenly rang out behind the bushes, and Lenin's crippled fowl came tumbling down. Alyabyev's neighbour, Nikita Pankov, leapt from the willows, put an end to the bird with another shot, picked it up and turned slowly to his hiding place.

"What are you doing?" roared Ivan. "Grabbing somebody else's duck?"

"If it were yours, you'd have picked it up," sneered Nikita. "Call yourselves sportsmen!"

Vladimir Ilyich listened to the quarrel, smiling.

"D'you know whose duck you've grabbed?" fumed Ivan. "That duck...."

Vladimir Ilyich tugged his coat, still smiling, but with gleaming eyes.

"Don't get excited, Ivan Vasilyevich. I wounded the bird, but he finished it off. Let him keep it. We'll bag some others."

Ivan Alyabyev recalled how the property of the land-owner Valkov had been divided. That vicious Nikita had shouted then: "Alyabyev has been hobnobbing with the gentry, and now he's asking for his share! We won't stand for that!" Some of the peasants had agreed with and abetted Nikita, for all of Ivan's cursing: he threatened to complain to Lenin himself. The village, however, finally took his side, refusing to deprive him of land only because he had hunted with the gentry; for all the row they had made, Nikita's neighbours refused to support him. Thinking of all this, Ivan Alyabyev's heart ached again from this old hurt.

"But that's an outrage, Comrade Lenin!" he growled, his eyebrows bristling. "How can we let the fellow grab our game from under our noses! I'll...."

"Be quiet!" said Vladimir Ilyich. "The birds are turning."

Alyabyev bent low as Lenin raised his gun and fired. A duck spiralled to the water.

"Axai!" commanded the hunter.

The setter plunged overboard and swam off. Vladimir Ilyich's eyes were shining. This was a splendid morning he was having on the river. It reminded him of his childhood and youth, of Kokushkino, near Kazan, where he and his

brother Dmitry had often gone shooting. They often came home empty-handed, awfully tired, but happy. When asked what they had killed, Dmitry would laugh and answer: "Time".

The setter was swimming towards the boat with the duck in his teeth. Ivan caught him by the collar and took the bird carefully from his mouth. The dog scrambled back into the boat, the water streaming from his shining brown sides.

"The flight is finished, Vladimir Ilyich," said Ivan. "Let's move on to the game in the woods."

"Yes, it's time," agreed Vladimir Ilyich.

4

They went along the edge of a birch copse. A mossy marsh lay on the right: its hummocks were covered with rose-tinted cranberries. Ivan unleashed Axai, letting him run loose. Quickly finding the scent the dog paused before two small birches.

Vladimir Ilyich's gun went to his shoulder.

"Take it!" said the hunter, goading Axai.

The setter stood still, his left foreleg slightly raised. The birds must have been very near. Ivan looked at Vladimir Ilyich and nodded, as though to say: "Keep your eyes open!"

Lenin felt the familiar sportsman's tremor in his legs. He could hardly breathe. The shrubs rustled in the breeze, and young thrushes were piping in the birch-trees. His gun at the ready, Lenin stood still, but could hear nothing except the beating of his heart.

The sun was high, bathing the sky in tender light, and the air was so transparent that the trees seemed drowsily suspended in space.

Ivan broke the spell by whistling to his dog as he strode

towards the birches. The whole brood swept noisily into the open, scattering over the mossy marshes.

Vladimir Ilyich lowered his gun, turning his narrow laughing eyes on Ivan. Then he sighed and wiped his face with a handkerchief.

"You've missed the chance, Vladimir Ilyich!" wailed the old man. "Here in the open you could have given them both barrels and bagged at least two."

Vladimir Ilyich smiled guiltily.

"White partridge!"

Ivan frowned.

"Good Lord! Who'd see you do it, Vladimir Ilyich?"

Ivan Alyabyev's beard and whiskers shook. He looked at Lenin with sad uncomprehending eyes. Vladimir Ilyich, meanwhile, set the safety catch and slung his gun back on to his shoulder.

"Bolsheviks have got to set an example to others," he said, "and you're tempting me to do a bit of poaching! That's not very nice, Ivan Vasilyevich!"

Vladimir Ilyich's laughter was infectious; his eyes were shining mischievously. Ivan, for his part, was nonplussed. What sort of a person was he, Lenin? The chiefs roaming the woods in the old days shot whatever they saw, caring not a whit. But Lenin was refusing to shoot partridge protected by the game laws!

Like other hunters, Ivan, too, used to kill forbidden animals and birds when times were hard; but he had done this with a quaking conscience, for in his soul he was opposed to poaching. Now that his ardour had cooled a little, he felt that Vladimir Ilyich had been perfectly right. "He's a just man," he thought.

Penetrating further into the forest, they found there was still dew on the ferns and junipers. There was a honeyed smell from the grass, and the patches of red bilberries were reddening so delicately it was a pity to step on them.

Vladimir Ilyich walked behind Ivan. The forest was magnificent in its silence and vivid summer colours.

Vladimir Ilyich had spent most of his life in cities. Though fond of urban life, he was always drawn to the woods and the rivers. At his desk in his study sometimes, he thought of the nights he had spent under a pale moon, sitting beside a pungent campfire, or of his wanderings in the woods with a gun slung on his shoulder.

"Tired, Vladimir Ilyich?" asked the hunter. "You'll rest for an hour, perhaps?"

"No!" said Lenin emphatically. "I'm ready to go on all day."

They cut through the deeper woods, reaching another patch of buckthorn and juniper shrubs. The coveys were numerous. Axai selected a fresh scent and froze in pointing posture. The first shots at the black grouse went awry. Watching Lenin, Ivan came closer.

"Better let them fly a bit farther, Vladimir Ilyich!" he advised. "They can't get away. The shot hangs together at short range, like a bullet. You can't hit them that way."

The dog drove a covey into the air. Alyabyev wheeled, raising his gun. When the grouse had flown to where he was sure of them he brought down two.

"That's the way!"

"I quite understand, Ivan Vasilyevich!" Lenin rubbed his hands, laughing. "I get too excited when those birds start up. I haven't done any shooting for a long time."

Vladimir Ilyich's shooting was surer after this lesson. Several birds fell to his gun. Axai retrieved them, and started off on fresh scents.

The dog worked faultlessly. He had a fine instinct for game and was swift and light in finding birds. The setter was never out of sight, and never once pointed where there was no game. Vladimir Ilyich praised the animal.

"There's no point in keeping a poor one," answered the hunter with dignity. "I never spare myself when training a dog, Vladimir Ilyich. What's the good of a bad dog for shooting? You just miss all the game!"

Axai was feverishly on a fresh scent now; his quarry was obviously darting for a thick stand of tall firs.

"A wood-grouse," whispered the hunter. "This is a cunning chap; thinks he'll get away. I'll cut round to meet you; keep close to the dog."

Ivan hurried off to one side, emerged on a patch of yellow flowers deeper in the forest, coughed once or twice, and moved to return. No sooner had Axai put his nose out to point than the grouse flew up with threshing wings.

Lenin's first shot just grazed the bird. The grouse wobbled as some of its tail feathers spun to the ground. But swinging mightily through the air the bird made for the thickets.

"He'll get away!" muttered Vladimir Ilyich, his sights still on the bird.

A second shot tumbled the grouse to the grass and both men ran to the spot.

"I was afraid!" said Alyabyev, "afraid you'd miss. It's hard to shoot with the sun in your eyes."

Lighting a fire of pine twigs, the hunter brought a pot of water and hung it over the flames. Waiting for the water to boil, he told of his hunting experiences. Then they talked of the land. Vladimir Ilyich's questions were animated and detailed, and Ivan felt it was impossible to be insincere, impossible to evade the truth when talking to Lenin.

Ivan reached for Vladimir Ilyich's gun, weighed it on his palm, and put it to his shoulder.

"It's a good gun," he said. "Responds well and keeps the shot bunched."

He pushed back the catch, broke the gun open, ran a rag wrapped on a twig through the barrels and peered through them against the sun.

"What steel!" he murmured. "Shines like a looking glass; and not a scratch anywhere! This gun is brand-new."

"I hardly use it," said Lenin. "I've no time."

The hunter's eyes were still on the gun.

"Would you let me play it for a while, Comrade Lenin?"

"Play it? Play what?" Lenin could not understand.

"Play on those barrels."

"How can you do that?" Lenin's eyes narrowed incredulously. "I never knew a gun could be used as a musical instrument. Go ahead, let's see."

The old man put the muzzles of the shot-gun to his lips, puffing his cheeks. Playing a trill or two as a trial, he scattered vague queer sounds through the woods. But they then settled on an even note; the old man's face reddened from his efforts. The tune he played reminded one of the bells on the horses of a troika. One could almost see the trio plunging along a smooth wintry road: the tinkling of the bells was mixed with the whining of the winds, the creaking of the frozen sleigh runners, and a haunting melody. But the bells grew feebler as the troika drifted away; one could barely hear them as they faded away in the snowy wastes.

"Why, that's excellent, Ivan Vasilyevich!" exclaimed Lenin. "You're an artist! I never heard anything of the kind. Where did you learn it?"

"It runs in our family," answered the hunter. "My father could play all sorts of things on the barrels of a gun, and do it better than I! I like to play them too. Sometimes I sit on a stump in the woods and play—it even brings the tears to my eyes."

The sun was drying the grass, warming the earth.

"What a fine day this is, Vladimir Ilyich!" said Ivan.  
"Shall we have a nap?"

"You have one," answered Vladimir Ilyich. "I'll sit up for a while."

Ivan stretched under a bush and fell asleep at once, like a man who had not slept for many nights.

Vladimir Ilyich leaned against a tree. The sun had moved perceptibly west, filling the forest with new colours; the birds were silent.

A swim would be just the thing, he thought. Rising, he strolled along the stream looking for a promising pool.

A pond opened before him suddenly like an overflowing bowl. Shedding his clothes, he dived from the high bank. The water had a sweet fresh taste.

Vladimir Ilyich came to the surface, took a deep breath, dived again and swam lightly out to the middle of the pond, hand over hand, as he had done in the Sviyaga River in his youth.

Then he sat on the sand for a long time, warming himself in the sun. He saw the dark backs of fish idling almost within reach, peering about with round glistening eyes, waving lazy tails in the shoals, rubbing their golden sides together. But a whisper of wind frightened the fish, and they plunged to greater depths, muddying the surface.

Voices woke the hunter. Opening his eyes reluctantly, he turned on his side. Vladimir Ilyich was sitting on a hummock surrounded with children and baskets of berries on the trampled grass. On a fallen tree, farther off, sat Ivan's neighbours, the white-bearded mushroom pickers, Fedot Rybnikov, and Feoktist Shatrov. Lenin was talking to the children.

"Were you ever a little boy, like me?" asked a fat tot in a green shirt.

"Oh yes," said Lenin. "I lived in the town of Simbirsk and often teased the geese. And the geese there are big and awfully angry. I'd tease them until they'd come for me. What did I do then? I'd lie down on my back and fight them off with my feet. That was the only way! Ganders can't take a joke, believe me!"

The children laughed and Lenin laughed with them.

"Where did they all come from?" wondered the hunter with irritation. "Won't let a man sleep!"

He waved fiercely at the children who understood the gesture, said good-bye to their guest, and went away. But the mushroom pickers were not thinking of going away.

"You're a stranger in these parts, aren't you?" ventured Fedot Rybnikov, eyeing Lenin sharply.

"From Moscow," answered Lenin.

"How's Moscow? Still in the same place?"

Lenin began to tell them about Moscow, and the oldsters listened attentively. He explained that the Bolsheviks meant to cover the whole country with a network of power stations sending electricity to the factories and new cities. This brought a hum of approval.

But Ivan Alyabyev was annoyed. This was the very situation the chairman of the Uyezd Executive Committee had warned him about. "I'll catch it when they hear about this in town!" he thought. "But it's not my fault! Did I invite anyone? This is Sunday and everybody is out in the woods. You can't guard against that!"

He got up, brought some more twigs, rekindled the fire and hung the pot over the embers.

"And how are you getting on?" Lenin asked the old men.

"Not so well," reflected Fedot. "But it looks like things are getting better for the peasants. I've outlived three tsars, brother! I've seen good days and bad, and know what's

what. This government knows its job, it's trying to do things for the people, and the peasants are satisfied. Only there's a lot of muddle yet; there's no salt in the shops, nor kerosene either."

Vladimir Ilyich stirred. Rubbing his head with his hands, he asked about the school, the local co-operative, and the work of the Volost Soviet. The old men gave detailed replies, weighing their words and citing examples.

"Listen to me, Moscow hunter," began Feoktist Shatrov, "and I'll tell you how Lenin-Ulyanov helped one of the women in our village."

"Did he really?" asked Lenin smiling.

"As God is my witness! Just listen! There's a man among us, Afonya Telegin by name. He's not a bad fellow —sensible enough. But when he's had a drink he beats his wife. He kept beating his Lukeria for about ten years. She stood for all this only until Soviet power came. She must have understood something about it, for she told her husband: 'No more nonsense from you, or I'll complain to Lenin-Ulyanov!' And what do you think? Afonya came to his senses!"

"They're afraid of Lenin, are they?" asked Vladimir Ilyich.

"Some are afraid and some respect him," answered Fedot Rybnikov. "There are all kinds of people, and you can't please them all. One fellow will do everything that's wanted at the bat of an eye, but another needs a whip to drive him even into Paradise."

Feoktist complained of the local doctor.

"Goes all over on his bike, or sits fishing by the lake. He has no time for the sick! What does the fellow get his wages for, anyway!"

Lenin's brows came gravely together.

"Why don't you complain to the Uyezd Soviet?"

"Smart, aren't you!" snickered the old man. "What if they take him off his job? They won't find another doctor,

and what'll we do? The leech in Shuklov was no good either. There was no use going to him sick as you were, unless you toted a bottle of moonshine. The muzhiks complained about him and he was kicked out straight away. But they've put no one in his place. 'We're short of doctors!' they say. Soviet power is making a big mistake there!"

"It hasn't got down to that problem yet!" admonished Lenin. "This is a big question. There really aren't enough doctors, teachers, and agronomists; and you can't train them in a year. You've got to have time for that. We're going to train specialists for the villages from among the peasants' children, from among the workers."

"That wouldn't be bad," agreed Shatrov.

When the pot boiled, Ivan spread his cape on the grass and set down the basket of food prepared by his wife. Lenin invited the mushroom pickers to join him, and the old men agreed with pleasure.

Suddenly Fedot asked:

"Tell me, friend, do you ever happen to see Ulyanov-Lenin in Moscow?"

"Sometimes," answered Lenin.

"Would you mind bringing him these mushrooms as a present? Tell him they're from an old man, old man Fedot who lives in the village of Vakhonin."

"I could do that," agreed Lenin with some confusion. "Only, what's the use, really? They'll get crushed on the way."

"No they won't!" declared the old man. "The mushrooms around here are firm. They'll last to Siberia!"

"Take mine too," begged Feoktist. "It's nothing to you. You won't have to carry them on your back! You've got a car. And Lenin will enjoy knowing that the old folk think about him. These are the best mushrooms he'll find anywhere! He'll enjoy them I'm sure!"

"I'll have to do as you say, I suppose," said Vladimir Ilyich smiling, as he transferred the mushrooms into a string bag.

Feoktist meanwhile led Ivan aside:

"Who's that hunter, Ivan?"

"An old acquaintance," said Alyabyev glumly. "He works in some office somewhere."

"He's a sensible man," said Feoktist approvingly. "I could talk to him for all of a week, and listen to him, too! Seems to me I saw him somewhere. I can't remember."

"You're imagining things!" snapped the hunter. "He's never been out here before."

When the old men left, Vladimir Ilyich got up and began to pace the clearing, obviously happy.

Ivan's prophecy came true towards evening: the sky grew overcast and a hot wind brushed the forest, shaking and bending the pines. Thunder shook the air, and a hissing shower began.

Lenin and his guide hid under a pine. They could hear the rain singing in the trees, and muddy rivulets snaked down the hills, setting the rotting leaves and pine-needles afloat. The old man lit his pipe and told of some queer things that had happened to him while out with his gun. His voice was muffled by the driving rain. The lightning had receded to the west by now. Rain-washed, the trees were wonderfully fragrant. All was quiet and moist beneath them and heavy drops fell rhythmically from their branches.

The sky grew brighter and a feeble shaft of sunset fell through the trees. The bluebells and white daisies grew radiant in the glade. Night was stealing in from

the forest, though daylight still trembled amid the wet pines.

Lenin stooped to pick a little red carnation. He smelled it, then tightened his belt and said:

"Home we go, Ivan Vasilyevich!"

They trudged straight for the village, ignoring the grouse popping provocatively from the tall grass.

Ivan put the mushrooms and the game in the back of the car. Maria Petrovna came out with a bottle of milk and some hot muffins.

"Please take this with you," she said. "You've a long way to go and will surely be hungry!"

Vladimir Ilyich thanked the old woman, then poured the remaining cartridges from his ammunition pouch.

"Take these, Ivan Vasilyevich!" he said. "You'll need them. Our guns use the same calibre."

There was quite a heap of cartridges, and the hunter was pleased. But he hesitated to take them, nevertheless.

"Oh no, Comrade Lenin! I can get along without them. You're too busy to prepare a fresh batch!"

"Please accept them!"

While still in the woods Ivan had resolved to take no money for his services. How could he accept money from Lenin! This had been a huge stroke of luck. It wasn't everybody who could walk side by side with Lenin, sit by the fire with him, play a tune for him on shot-gun barrels, joke and talk with him! On the other hand he was troubled—it would be very awkward to refuse the money if Lenin offered any. But Vladimir Ilyich seemed to have read his mind and found a simple and natural solution. Those cartridges were a gift, something he could not refuse.

Lenin invited Ivan to visit him in Moscow.

"Thanks, Comrade Lenin," said the old hunter, deeply

moved. "I'll visit you when I have the chance. I'll have a look at Moscow. But come back in the autumn, when the first snow falls. We'll shoot some hares and foxes. I've got a beagle from Kostroma that'll go after any animal."

"I certainly shall," answered Lenin.

The chauffeur revved up his engine, and the big car soon rolled smoothly down the street.

Ivan watched until it was out of sight.

He was joined by Fedot Rybnikov and Feoktist Shatrov.

"Why did he leave so soon, Ivan?" asked Shatrov. "There's plenty of duck out on the farther lakes. You could have taken him there tomorrow."

"He's too busy," answered the hunter absently. "He's got to sign some new decrees."

The old men stared.

"What decrees?"

"The usual kind. He's Lenin-Ulyanov."

"Lenin?" Fedot Rybnikov snapped for air. "But you're lying, Ivan!"

"No! It was he, it was he!" exulted Shatrov. "I thought he reminded me of someone when we were out in the woods. I couldn't remember of whom. But now I remember! I've seen his pictures. It was he, all right!"

"So you've been fooling us, Ivan!" blurted Fedot. "I also saw he was no ordinary man. There was something special about him."

Bounding round a corner came Nikita Pankov with a pair of duck in his arms.

"Where's that Moscow sportsman of yours, Ivan?"

"He's just left," answered Ivan slyly. "He was sorry he couldn't wait for you, but sent his regards. 'That Nikita,' he said, 'is a wonderful hand at picking up other people's ducks!'"

"Too bad, too bad!" mourned Pankov. "Why, if I'd known who was in that boat with you I'd never have . . ."

Fedot Rybnikov and Feoktist Shatrov rocked with laughter. They did not like Nikita either for his irritable, envious nature, and were glad to see him in such an awkward fix.

"Let this be a lesson to you: don't be so greedy!" admonished the hunter. "How did you find out he was Lenin-Ulyanov?"

"Your old woman whispered it to mine, and she told me about it when I came home from the shoot. I nearly had a fit, I can tell you!"

The mushroom pickers were laughing again, while Ivan Alyabyev fumed at Maria Petrovna: "Didn't I tell you to hold your tongue? You've gone and spread it all over the village!"

Lenin at Gorki, 1922

Next two pages:

Lenin, Krupskaya and Anna Ulyanova-Yelizarova at Gorki in 1922.  
The children are Victor, Lenin's nephew, and Vera, the daughter of a worker

# **WORKERS ON LENIN**

Many books have been published in the Soviet Union, faithfully recording the memories of Lenin cherished by working men and women, by peasant messengers, students, and soldiers returned from the front—the living witnesses of Lenin's life.

Several such reminiscences are included in this section, the accounts of people who were fortunate enough to see Lenin and talk to him.

## THE STOVE-MAKER

**T**here was a man among us by the name of Benderin. He could do almost anything on a farm: build a stove, a set of shelves, a sleigh, or whatever you liked.

One day he went to a copse to cut down a maple.

Sawing away, he suddenly heard somebody say: "Hullo!"

He looked round, of course, and saw a man.

"Sorry, your excellency. I didn't see you."

"I'm not 'your excellency'!" came the answer. "I'm Comrade Lenin."

"Sorry again, Comrade Lenin," said Benderin.

"All right, carry on with your work!" urged Lenin.

He walked some little distance away and watched to see what Benderin would do next. This was a heavy tree; how was he going to get it to the village without a horse?

Benderin measured the length he needed with his saw, sawed it off and sent it rolling and rolling downhill. Then he came back to saw off the next section.

"Maybe you need some help?" asked Lenin.

"What for? I can manage it myself."

Then came another time: it was at the height of the hay-making. The selfsame Benderin had gone to the woods again for more material.

Having cut down a maple, or was it a birch, he crossed a small stream and sat down to rest towards evening.

Sitting there, he saw three men walking through the hay.

Now Benderin was a testy sort of muzhik, and he shouted:

"Get out of the hay! D'you know what hay costs nowadays?" He waved them away, swearing. But the three came nearer, and one of them finally said:

"You're pretty good at cursing, aren't you, old man?"  
Benderin recognised him straight away.

"Sorry again, Comrade Lenin!"

Then came winter, and there was a great demand for stove-makers.

Sitting in his house, Vladimir Ilyich one day asked:

"Isn't there a stove-maker in the village, one who could rid us of all this smoke?"

Everybody knew Benderin and remembered that stove-making was one of his many trades.

"We've got one," they said, and told where to fetch him.

Two soldiers drove to Benderin's home behind a pair of fast trotters. Entering the house, they asked him:

"Aren't you a stove-maker?"

"I am!" admitted Benderin from under the ceiling, for he was lying on his own stove just then, his head hanging over the side.

"Well come down and get dressed! We're going to the state farm!"

This set Benderin shivering all over.

"Good-bye Katya!" he told his wife. "We'll never meet again! Lenin's probably remembered how I cursed him last summer."

He got into the buggy and the soldiers headed the horses round for the state farm.

When they arrived, Lenin came out and said:

"I remember you, old man! You're the one who sawed up that maple in the grove; and you're also the one who yelled at me in the hay!"

Benderin grew weak with fear.

"I'm still sorry!"

"That's a trifle!" soothed Lenin. "You were right to yell at me. I shouldn't have been walking through the

hay. But let's talk about what I called you for.... I'd like you to do me a favour. See how I live? My walls are black from smoke. Couldn't you fix the chimney?"

"I could," said Benderin.

He asked for some clay, some bricks and went to work.

When he was finished Lenin thanked him, paid him, and sat down to tea with him.

Benderin rode off behind the same trotters. When he got home he told his wife very importantly:

"Katya! I've fixed Comrade Vladimir Ilyich's stove and had tea with him!"

Recorded from the words  
of Alexei Mikhailovich Shurygin  
in the village of Gorki,  
Podolsk District, Moscow Region, in 1937

## TWENTY RATIONS

**A**t the dawn of Soviet power, when the struggle for bread meant the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the old Bolshevik Alexander Tsyrupa, one of Lenin's closest companions, told us, workers on the food front, the following noteworthy incident showing the sort of man Vladimir Ilyich was.

"I was asked to come to Vladimir Ilyich's study that morning," began Alexander Tsyrupa. "Entering the room I saw him explaining something to Dzerzhinsky, Chairman of the Cheka, who sat listening with a frown. Turning to me, Lenin offered his hand.

"Felix Edmundovich has complained about you," he said with a worried air. "It seems, my friend, we've been withholding all of twenty rations of bread from the bourgeois arrested by the Cheka. How do you account for that?"

"Vladimir Ilyich!" I answered. "You know we haven't enough bread even for the workers making arms for the front. Where shall we get twenty extra rations for the counter-revolutionaries arrested by the Cheka?"

"See?" said Vladimir Ilyich pausing before Dzerzhinsky. "That's what's happening to your prisoners."

"I understand, Vladimir Ilyich. I see it very well, but what good does that do?" answered Dzerzhinsky. "We've arrested those people and have got to feed them."

"True enough!" agreed Lenin and again turned to me. "Look here! What if you rummaged deeper in the bread bins? Perhaps you could scrape up some twenty rations that way?"

I hated to disappoint Lenin, but I had to remind him of the dire circumstances in Moscow and Petrograd....

Lenin turned to Dzerzhinsky again, but he only lifted his shoulders.

"Let's see!" Vladimir Ilyich thought hard. "You say we're short of only twenty rations for the sinners? Which means the rest are not so badly off. Do you know what I think, comrades? There is a solution, albeit a very simple one. Felix Edmundovich! Select twenty of the least aggressive bourgeois, make them promise they won't be up to their old tricks against Soviet power again, and release them on parole. Those people must be hungry, so please do it at once. . . ."

V. Timofeyev,  
member of the C.P.S.U. since 1914,  
Noginsk

## A WORKER MEETS LENIN IN THE KREMLIN BARBER SHOP

**T**here is a barber shop in the Kremlin of Moscow; and it was a fairly good one even in 1921.

I had a shave there only once, when I was commissioned for the task of transferring weapons from the Peter and Paul Fortress to the arsenal in the Kremlin: swords, rifles, and other fire-arms.

That was the first time I had ever been in the Kremlin; and in due course I went to the barber shop for a shave. There were six of us waiting our turn.

Suddenly Lenin came in, wanting a shave, too. We all got up to greet him, of course.

"How do you do, Vladimir Ilyich!"

"How do you do, comrades!" he answered.

Then he took some magazines from his pocket and sat down to read. We also settled in our seats, watching him intently.

One of the chairs was soon vacated, and he was invited in out of turn.

"Thanks!" he said, but did not budge. "We've got to keep order and take our turns. We make the rules ourselves, you know!"

He would not move, though we pleaded: "You're very busy, Vladimir Ilyich! And we can wait a bit!"

We also kept our seats, no one stirring.

Afraid to hurt our feelings, he thanked us and occupied the chair. He had a shave and went away, saying:

"Good-bye comrades!"

That's the only time I met Lenin.

It only lasted a few minutes. The barber had him shaved before I could have a good look at him. But I still remember how he sat opposite me, being shaved.

Grigory Ivanovich Ivanov,  
fitter at the Krasny Vyborzhets Plant  
in Leningrad

## LENIN AT A SUBBOTNIK

**A**n All-Russian *subbotnik* was organised by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on May 1, 1920. There was no corner throughout the country where the people did not come out to work on that day. I was in charge of the Kremlin trainees and came out on the Kremlin square with my men. A part of the square was littered with junk and building materials, which considerably hampered our drilling and other military exercises.

Being the training commissar, I stood at the right flank. Suddenly Comrade Peterson, the Kremlin commandant, came up to me, saying: "Comrade Lenin has come to take part in the *subbotnik*."

Then I saw him, waiting for instructions a few steps away. He was wearing an old worn suit and boots.

I invited him to take his place at my right, as our senior, and he complied at once, saying:

"Just tell me what I've got to do."

"Fall in! Right turn!" commanded the *subbotnik* chief at that moment, and off we marched to the job. The work had to be done in pairs; and Vladimir Ilyich and I proceeded to lift heavy poles together.

He kept trying to seize the stout end of each pole, while I wanted him to have the thinner and lighter end, and soon we were arguing:

"You're carrying heavier loads than I!" he admonished.

"So I am," I answered, "because you're fifty and I'm twenty-eight."

He worked splendidly, nearly always on the run, trying to outstrip the others, as though to show that one had to work fast. I grew tired eventually; and everybody, for that matter, paused for a rest. Comrade Lenin then sat down with the trainees.

It was a sunny day, and the music was invigorating. Hard physical labour like ours seemed the best thing in the world just then. Someone in the group offered Comrade Lenin a cigarette.

"No, thanks," he said. "I don't smoke. I once smoked myself sick with some other boys at school, and I've never tried it again."

Resuming our work, we had to move some very heavy blocks of oak. Each had to be carried on poles by a team of six. We had to rest twice on the way before setting them down where they belonged.

Vladimir Ilyich kept working with the trainees for four hours.

Those four hours of hard physical work with Lenin will remain in my memory forever.

I. Borisov

## THE BUTTON

Lenin came to our plant one day—and someone shouted to me: "Natorova! Put his coat away!"

The club hall was very warm, and Lenin had slung his coat over a chair when he began to speak. I caught it up and carried it to the cloak-room. Suddenly I noticed there was a button missing on his coat, in the centre on the left side. Off went a button from my jacket, and I sewed it on Lenin's coat with specially strong thread to keep it there for a long time. He left the plant, never noticing he had a button where there was none before. My button was a little different from the others. I was so proud of it; it was my secret!

A long time passed. And walking along Liteiny Street one day I saw an enlarged photograph of Lenin in the show window of the "Phoenix" photography establishment. He was wearing the same coat; and looking attentively I could see my button was still there.

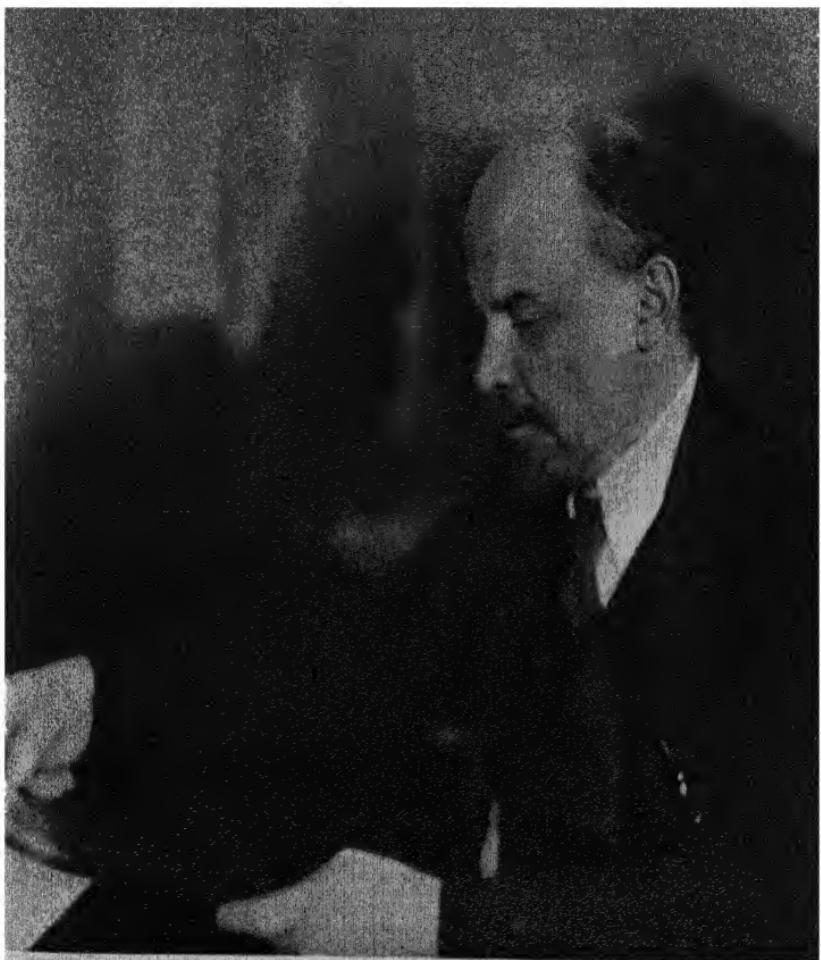
He died that winter.

I managed to get that photograph from Liteiny Street. It's in a frame now next to my mirror. I have a look at it every day—and weep.

But my button is still there.

As told by housewife Natorova  
of Archangel

Lenin. Petrograd, January 1918





# **L. RADISHCHEV**

Leonid Radishchev, who lives in Leningrad, published his first writings in 1926. His collection of stories about Lenin appeared in 1939, before the Second World War. In recent years he has written new stories about Lenin for the *Zvezda*, *Neva* and other magazines. Leonid Radishchev's story "No plates!" was written in 1960 and published in the collection of the year's best stories.

Lenin and Sverdlov examine the temporary monument to Marx and Engels

# **NO PLATES!**

## **(A STORY)**

**S**trolling through spring-time Moscow, the young man carefully avoided the blue puddles, whistling and cheerfully thinking: "What a wonderful thing the sun is! So much light—and all of it free! And no trouble at all to get it, no magnesium flashes! From now on I'm a child of the sun! Let it do my work for me!"

The young man regarded the munificence of Moscow's early spring from his own point of view, of course; he was a photographer, and not just a photographer, but "our photo correspondent", as the newspapers plainly stated beneath his pictures.

Our modern photo correspondents sporting bright mackintoshes and handsome leather-cased cameras, slung over their shoulders, would have probably smiled at his queer get-up sewn from a faded lilac material more suitable for curtains, his huge felt boots soled with red rubber, and particularly at his camera as big at least as an average accordion.

He would not have changed places with them, for all that. With this "accordion" he had photographed the first Soviet May Day, the first *subbotnik*, the opening of the first rest home, the first tank captured in battle from the Whites, and so on.

Today his newspaper had instructed him to take some pictures of the meeting of Party functionaries at Sverdlov University; this was a rally of Party members about to leave for the villages. The huge auditorium of Sverdlov University was hazy with smoke. The light streamed in through the but recently thawed windows. A table on a platform was covered with red calico. On the wall behind it a huge map of the old Russian Empire was festooned with tiny coloured pennants.

The business on the order of the day sounded peaceful enough: "On work in the villages." But the people gathered here were this day to go to districts in the throes

of kulak insurrection. They would have to fight through the fearful crowds at the stations and find their way through the chaos prevailing on the railways. . . .

Our photographer moved about here and there, climbed a window-sill and snapped the first row of the audience ("Listening to the speaker").

Tilting his "accordion" up a bit, he let it click again ("General view of the hall").

He bustled about somewhat longer than one might have expected from "our correspondent," but this was of course due to his youth, for he was hardly twenty.

Having taken two or three shots, he began to look for a convenient vantage point from which to snap the speaker standing beside the big map with a pointer in his hand. Suddenly, there was timid clapping in the first rows, followed by an avalanche of applause.

Utterly confused, "our correspondent" flapped his straw eye-lashes: he had evidently missed something. Everyone in the hall had risen, and he, too, rose on tiptoe while balancing his cumbersome "accordion" and tripod. He began to push forward, working as hard as he could with his free shoulder.

A short stocky man in a brown jacket was hurrying to join the presiding members of the meeting on the platform; and "our correspondent's" heart stood still. "Why, that's Lenin!" he nearly shouted, gripping his tripod.

Lenin sat some ten paces away, looking at the stormy hall, narrowing his eyes and wiping his prominent brow.

"Good Lord!" muttered the photographer. "That's Lenin himself! . . . Vladimir Ilyich. . . . What a shot I'll get! . . . What lighting! What an opportunity!"

But this was an opportunity not easily exploited, for Vladimir Ilyich did not like to be photographed and permission to take his picture was exceedingly difficult to

get. Many other photographers had had to beat a retreat under similar circumstances.

Last spring—and “our correspondent” knew the story very well—Lenin had flatly refused to be photographed during the May Day *subbotnik* in the Kremlin: “What’s all this about!? I came here to work and not to be photographed!”

The photographers had had to resort to a stratagem. The commissar of the Kremlin trainees’ school, who had been Lenin’s work mate, tarried a few seconds, as though he needed a rest, and Vladimir Ilyich was surreptitiously photographed. That is how the world got its photograph of Lenin at work at the Kremlin’s *subbotnik*.

“The next speaker is Comrade Lenin,” announced the chairman.

\* \* \*

Lenin left the hall an hour later, accompanied by the tall officer who had presided over the meeting, and the members of the presidium. Still talking, Vladimir Ilyich donned his cap and reached for his brief-case. Suddenly his eyes fell on a man some distance away. The fellow seemed to be going into confused and bashful tantrums, trying to hide a tripod and a big black box.

Lenin was obviously annoyed, for he eyed the black box with a frown.

“Aha! Congratulations! You’re at it again!” he said. “Not this time, please!”

That was all! He might go now.

But “our correspondent” did not go. To everybody’s surprise he spoke up in a quaking bass, much as if he had a cold:

“Comrade Lenin!... Your photographs are wanted by the whole Republic.... They’re not just for me!”

“Hm ... is that so?” replied Vladimir Ilyich ironically.

But several people now came to the defence of "our correspondent" and everybody was soon begging Lenin to have his picture taken with them.

"If we're all photographed together . . . perhaps!" he answered uncertainly.

"Our correspondent" grew very active. Planting his tripod and adjusting his camera, he went through many unnecessary motions, constantly muttering:

"Just a second, please! I'll be ready in a moment. . . . Just a second!"

Getting the group into focus was anything but easy, for each wanted to be photographed with Lenin and tried quietly to oust his neighbour. Vladimir Ilyich waited patiently.

When everything seemed ready, the photographer got under the black cloth behind his camera, adjusted for final focus and muttered again: "Just a second! I'll just put another plate in. . . . I'll be ready in a jiffy!"

Everybody in the group assumed a solemn immobile sort of look. A spark of humour glimmered only in Lenin's eyes.

But what was happening to the photographer. He had fitfully ripped the cloth from himself, dropped a tin of some sort, and was reaching for his hair. Everybody stared, surprised and anxious. Lenin quickly approached the young man:

"What's the matter, comrade? Feeling bad?"

"Bad!" answered the photographer brokenly. "I didn't manage to load a plate-holder, I haven't any with plates in them!"

He stood beside his "accordion" with arms dangling, a broken figure. A scratch left on his chin by the clumsy shave he had given himself that morning began to quiver. This was the end! He, wretch and chronic failure, had lost this incredible, inimitable moment!

"Well comrades!" said the tall officer replacing his military cap with the big red star. "A regrettable misprint has slipped in, as they say, owing to circumstances beyond the control of the editors!... There's no point in delaying Vladimir Ilyich!"

Still looking at the photographer, Lenin seemed oblivious of everything around. He drew out his watch, glanced at it, and asked:

"How long would it take you to load a plate?"

"Take me? About... ten minutes!" stammered "our correspondent." Red blotches appeared on his ashen face.

"I could talk to the comrades ten minutes more," said Lenin calmly.

The photographer pounced on a heap of empty plate-holders and a box of plates and ran off, his legs moving awkwardly in his huge felt boots.

He ran down a long corridor trying the auditorium doors, and on and on. He needed a dark room, absolutely dark! And the sun whose child he had become that morning was shining with dazzling abundance.

Bounding upstairs, he panted in the hot air. But relentless fingers of sunlight followed him everywhere.

His heart was throbbing nearly in his throat when he reached the top floor. There was a large wooden chest on the landing.

Without a second's hesitation "our correspondent" threw back the lid and saw some fat hoses lying there like coiled pythons, all stinking of rubber.

Into the box he went, hardly feeling the blow he got on the head from the lid. Doubled up, he quickly unsealed the box of plates, but at once shoved it under his jacket, his features contorted with horror; a thin ray had penetrated even here through some chink or other.

A passing charwoman dropped her broom with a scream when the lid of the big box on the landing flew

open and a man shot up, sneezed, licked his lips, and hoarsely said:

"It's me!... Just a second please.... Be so kind.... Sit on this lid.... There's a chink and it's letting the light.

She stood round-eyed.

"Please sit on this lid, please!"

The lid went down and she sat on it wondering what was happening, whether she ought to shut the latch on the big box and call the superintendent.

She heard a rumbling inside, a lot of snorting, and a choked voice pleading:

"Let me out, please, I'm dying!"

She slid off, and our Jack popped out of his box again, sweaty, dusty, and happy.

"Total darkness!" he exulted. "Thanks!"

Down the stairs he flew, skipping half a dozen at a time!

\* \* \*

The trees were still spreading their brown unwarmed claws to the sun. Shapeless patches of snow clung to the boulevards, though grey and porous as a sponge, by now. The bills and posters peeling from the walls billowed in the wind. Hunks of green ice fell out of the drain-pipes.

The young man was walking through spring-time Moscow with glowing cheeks. When he stopped now and then and ecstatically parted his hands, the few passers-by stared wonderingly.

His home was colder than the street. The frozen little kitchen with its single boarded-up window was saturated with the odour of thawing plaster—the only sign of spring in this house.

Feeling for the switch in the dark, the young man lit a red lamp, for the kitchen was his laboratory.

Photo correspondents sporting bright mackintoshes and handsome leather-cased cameras slung from their shoulders would have probably smiled again at the sight of such a laboratory. But now the young man would have been more loath to exchange with them than ever! Not for anything in the world!

He placed a dish of developer on a stool and breathed on it, hoping to warm it at least a little. His hands shook as he submerged the plate. Squatting beside the stool, he gently rocked the dish. Tiny red waves rippled on the surface of the liquid. The milky emulsion was beginning to yield a clear dark pattern, and he saw the familiar outline of the large forehead, the brows closing over narrowed eyes. This started him singing at the top of his cracked and fuzzy bass.

Next morning he spent hours choosing the best prints, the ones without blots or scratches. Having chosen two, he slid them into an envelope, and reverently sealed it, gloating over every motion.

All he had to do now was write the address.

Striking a match several times to get its damp sulphur burning, he warmed the frozen ink-well, dipped his pen and was lost in thought, his eyes on the envelope. Suddenly he smiled and traced the following printed letters:

## L E N I N

That was all! That was the address!

A letter with such an address could be safely mailed anywhere in the world—in Calcutta, Greenland, or on Cyprus. It would find its destination for sure!...

Some time afterwards "our correspondent" was told the following:

A well-known artist who had been honoured with the

assignment of drawing Lenin's portrait in his study at the Council of People's Commissars once asked Vladimir Ilyich if he had any photographs of himself. Whereupon Lenin answered that he did not usually preserve his pictures, though he still had one....

He opened a drawer and handed the artist an envelope which had been neatly opened.

"This picture was taken by a young comrade at Sverdlov University!"

He smiled, probably recalling the incident of the empty plate-holder.

Lenin at a section meeting of the  
Second Comintern Congress. July-  
August, 1920





# **S. VINOGRADSKAYA**

During the first years of the revolution Sophia Vinogradskaya served as assistant to Maria Ulyanova, Lenin's sister, then employed as secretary of the editorial office of the newspaper **Pravda**. She often met Lenin, his relatives and friends. These occasions were subsequently described in "The **Pravda** File", "Two Evenings", "The First Lady", "The Seal Skin Cloak", "Chaliapin's Concert", and other of her stories filling several books.

Clara Zetkin and Nadezhda Krupskaya

**ANNIVERSARY**

**T**he third spring of the Revolution coincided with the fifty-first spring in Lenin's life.

The Moscow Party organisation had a membership of 35,000 by that time. They had joined the Bolshevik Party under fire—when the Party was underground in the days of 1905, in the years of reaction, on the eve of the October hurricane, and in the crucial months of the proletarian republic. Some were old people with white hair; others were youths who had joined the fighters for Soviet power from the school bench. Some were theoreticians of communism, and others, hard-working, hitherto oppressed people who were learning the ABC of communism along with that of their native language.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin was a member of the Moscow Party organisation.

His friends hoped to spend his fiftieth birthday evening with him and wanted to arrange a celebration at the House of the Press on Nikitsky Boulevard, the most popular club in those years. The hall of the club, unfortunately, was too small to hold all who wanted to come.

It was decided, therefore, to transfer the celebration to the premises of the Moscow Party Committee on Bolshaya Dmitrovka Street. Suddenly the entire venture came up against an unforeseen obstacle—the hero of the day flatly refused to attend his own anniversary.

"Vladimir won't hear of it!" said his sister Maria to her elder sister. "He won't budge, Anna! He says he's had his fill of eulogies at the congress and can't bear any more!"

Listening to this telephone conversation between Maria Ilyinichna and her sister, the employees and editors of the newspaper *Pravda* whispered jokingly to one another:

"If Vladimir won't budge there'll be no fiftieth anniversary for Lenin!"

Meanwhile, evenings in celebration of Lenin's fiftieth birthday were held spontaneously all over Moscow, though without his participation.

On April 17, the Saturday before his birthday, the Party sub-district of the Vindavskaya Railway and the railway's political department arranged a "trial of Lenin", a unique theatrical debate. Such "trials" were popular in those days and indeed favourite methods of political work among the masses.

The initiators of the "trial" argued as follows: "The capitalist world has united against Lenin because he overthrew the capitalists and landowners in Russia, did away with private property, and is calling for world revolution. Lenin has been in power for more than two years, and let us judge him by the things he has done."

The idea caught on very well and the "trial" was attended by workers from all sections of the Vindavskaya line. The witnesses for the prosecution were a bourgeois, a kulak, a loafer, a deserter, and a Menshevik, while those for the defence were a German proletarian, a soldier wounded in the First World War, a Russian worker, a working woman, and a poor peasant. The prosecutor presented his indictment against Lenin in the name of the Russian and world bourgeoisie. The counsel for the defence was a communist who knew the Programme of the Party very well.

The "jury" of workers and peasants heard the witnesses, the pleas of prosecution and defence and reached the verdict of "not guilty."

An account of the trial was sent to *Pravda*.

"That's something we must print!" said Maria Ilyinichna. She took it home to show it to Lenin. Returning with it in the evening, she said: "Send it to the printers. I read it to Vladimir Ilyich and he approves."

"Of the verdict?" came the sly question from Sasha, the assistant secretary.

"No, but because they celebrated his birthday without him and never summoned him to court!"

"Will he come to the Moscow Committee or won't he?" asked the *Pravda* employees.

Maria Ilyinichna shook her head. "I hardly think so, judging by his anti-celebration mood."

"We'll have to launch a campaign, a sort of 'Vladimir Ilyich persuasion week' in Moscow," joked the editors.

"Run away!" Maria Ilyinichna waved her hands, sweeping the jokers from her office.

"Vladimir Ilyich ought to understand the comrades, for all that," said Sasha when the others had left. "He's living in the same city with them and ought to see them on such a day. What do you think, Maria Ilyinichna?"

"You're pulling my heart-strings!"

"But I'm serious, Maria Ilyinichna. Everyone is in good spirits now. We've had successes at the fronts...."

"I know, child! But Vladimir Ilyich can't bear anything of that sort..." Maria Ilyinichna grimaced and pinched the air with her fingers, as though plucking something unpleasant away. "Honours and celebrations go against his grain. They simply bore him. The comrades ought to take account of this. Why force a man?"

"Is Vladimir Ilyich bored very often?" asked Sasha.

"In general, he has no time to be bored," answered the secretary of the editorial office with a condescending smile at this childish question of her young assistant. "But he finds all idle talk or 'nonsense about this and that', as he puts it, dreadfully wearisome. He's interested in everything new. Vladimir Ilyich likes to be told things he hasn't heard before."

Turning her head to the window, she fixed her eyes, as was her habit, on some distant point, non-existent perhaps, or visible to her alone. She spoke in a hollow voice, lost in her memories.

"It was always that way. At home, too, my elder brothers disliked inconsequential chatter."

Sasha grew tense. This was the second time Maria Ilyinichna had mentioned her brothers; and the girl's heart stood still whenever that happened. This, she felt, was something one should not and could not broach—the brothers . . . Alexander . . . Vladimir. . . .

Sasha was afraid to betray her excitement over Maria Ilyinichna's mention of her brothers, a theme that was so dear to her. To end the unbearable silence, Sasha began to rearrange the things on her desk. Maria Ilyinichna, meanwhile, recovered from that distract condition, in which she talked to herself, addressing no one in particular. Turning to her young assistant, she suddenly remembered something:

"Vladimir Ilyich even likes to say: 'Rather than chatter I would go hunting!'"

Taken aback somewhat, Sasha confessed:

"But I love a chat, Maria Ilyinichna. Everything is so interesting. . . ."

"Of course!" agreed Maria Ilyinichna nodding. "He's never bored when he's with Gorky, never begrudges his time when he's around."

"Lenin and Gorky! Just think of it!" sighed Sasha with childish intensity. "How I'd love to hear what they talk about, just once! Probably about literature?"

"Literature too," agreed Maria Ilyinichna, "but not only about literature. . . ."

The messenger came in with tea just then, and Maria Ilyinichna took her cup in both hands to warm her palms.

"If one could only write all their talks down, Maria Ilyinichna! Everything they say."

"What an ideal!" said Maria Ilyinichna with a shrug. "At home we always leave them to themselves, so they can talk to their hearts' content. Why disturb them! Gorky always has plenty to tell Ilyich: what the émigrés abroad

are writing about us, and what our scientists are doing. He's hardly in the house, still shedding his coat, so to speak, when Ilyich comes out to meet him, cheerfully asking: 'Well, Alexei Maximovich, what are the deposed classes saying about us?'"

"What does Gorky answer?"

"He laughs and says: 'I'll make my report, Vladimir Ilyich, as soon as I get out of my galoshes.'"

"Ha-ha-ha!" reverberated Sasha's laughter.

"There you go, rattling away like a sewing-machine!" exclaimed Maria Ilyinichna. "You've got me talking, pulling at my heart-strings...."

Setting her unfinished cup of tea on the window-sill, she spread a folder before her, with the notes from worker correspondents. Lenin's sister was ready to pore over those reports day and night. She proceeded to read the material received for the "workers' section", but an expression of affection for the person she had just been talking about still lingered in her dry, somewhat wary features.

\* \* \*

Opening the morning's mail on the next day Sasha found a large white envelope with the old seal of the Moscow Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); it was tightly packed with tickets, the Moscow Party Committee's invitations to the meeting dedicated to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's fiftieth birthday.

"Maria Ilyinichna!" shrilled Sasha. "So there's going to be a celebration after all! And you told Anna Ilyinichna that Vladimir Ilyich wouldn't even hear of it! But there you are! They've sent the invitations!"

Lenin's sister reached for the tickets; she examined them with compressed lips and then turned her eyes on the dim window unwashed since autumn. She sat very still, her chin on her wrist.

"Perhaps he has finally agreed?" she said uncertainly,

as though arguing with herself. Having counted the tickets, she wrote the names of several members of the editorial staff on a desk calendar, and handed one of the invitations to Sasha.

At four o'clock as always, Maria Ilyinichna drove home for dinner in her old-fashioned automobile, a Delone Belville, but extraordinarily enough, did not return for a long time.

Sasha sat in the office alone, wondering whether to go to the Moscow Committee or not? Would Lenin be there?...

The secretary of *Pravda* returned from the Kremlin towards evening. Noticing Sasha's puzzled questioning eyes, she shoved her towards the door without saying a word. That silent, encouraging gesture meant: "You may go!"

Asking no questions, for she had learned to read the eloquent eyes and features of her superior, Sasha grabbed her coat and tiny hat, waved a farewell, and darted from the office. With racing heart she walked fleetly down the corridor, skipped downstairs, and almost ran through the long narrow courtyard of the printing works that was crowded with carts and lorries. Once out of the gates, she moved even faster, her shoes splashing through the spring puddles on the fractured sidewalk of old narrow and crooked Tverskaya Street with its huddle of stunted houses behung with rusty iron signboards clangng in the wind.

Reaching the corner house whose top floor was occupied by the First Studio of the Art Theatre, a shrine she worshipped at, she stopped short, catching sight of her queerly distorted reflection in a luminous sphere filled with some vivid green liquid in the show-window of the chemist's shop on the ground floor. This reminded her that she had not changed her clothes. But she would surely miss the beginning of the celebration if she ran home now. What if Lenin were there already?

Gathering her coat resolutely around her, she stepped from the sidewalk and hurried across Soviet Square.

The tall Obelisk of the Constitution stood directly in her path; on the side of the obelisk facing the Moscow Soviet was the granite statue of a woman in a Phrygian cap and the free tunic of antiquity. This woman was the embodiment of the Revolution. Her arm was extended towards the Venetian windows of the Moscow Soviet vividly illuminated at that hour by the crystal chandeliers within. By their light Sasha could see the graceful sweep of the stone arm and the delicate curve of its granite fingers. On three sides of the obelisk's plinth paragraphs from the Soviet Constitution were inscribed on semi-circular bronze tablets. The letters were indistinguishable in the twilight of that April evening. In daylight, however, increasing numbers of visitors to the capital would crowd round the column, eagerly reading the bronze lines of the Constitution which had ushered in an era of new relations among men.

This obelisk, erected on the second anniversary of the October Revolution, was an example of the propaganda in stone to which Lenin ascribed such importance. Vladimir Ilyich himself had spoken from the narrow ledge of the plinth....

Sasha well remembered that Sunday in summer when the monument was unveiled. White-haired Smidovich who conducted the ceremony fixed his dark glasses on the crowd and declared:

"We have put up this monument to commemorate our Constitution—the fundamental law of the workers' state—'He who does not work, neither shall he eat....'"

Sasha had long been in the habit of viewing the houses and streets of Moscow in a kind of double light—as they had been before the Revolution and as they were now. She remembered all the changes to the city—they had all taken place before her eyes. The old that had been ousted

from the houses and streets of Moscow by the Revolution was still visible through the new in the same way as the outlines of the first picture in a film are visible through another superimposed upon it.

It was in that double light, too, that Sasha saw the edifice of the Moscow Soviet, with its harmony of proportion, its beautifully balanced windows and its clean-cut red and white walls. To her it was, at one and the same time, the former residence of the Governor-General of Moscow, standing on Skobelev Square, and the historic building where the headquarters of the Revolutionary Military Committee that directed the uprising in Moscow was located in October 1917.

The Obelisk of the Soviet Constitution always reminded her of its predecessor, the equestrian statue of General Skobelev, fiercely flourishing his sabre.

The cast-iron horseman was overturned after the October Revolution. He lay forgotten in a neighbouring courtyard until he was taken away to be melted down.

All this seemed so symbolical to Sasha—the old order had been consigned to the furnace of the Revolution.

Passing the obelisk Sasha hurried down steep, old-world Stoleshnikov Street. She walked by the archway of the old fire-station tower, the heels of her high boots clicking on the old flag-stones.

Around the corner, at right angles to the Moscow Soviet, she saw a handsome mansion with a courtyard viewed through an ornate cast-iron fence. In the old days this mansion had been the meeting place of a celebrated arts and literature circle. Theosophists had held forth here in the evenings, poets and artists had wrangled, and the card games had lasted till dawn....

The Moscow Party Committee had moved into this building after a bomb had destroyed its premises in Leon-tyevsky Street.

Moscow Bolsheviks were streaming towards the mansion on this April evening.

The long narrow hall with its hard seats was familiar to Sasha, for conferences of Party propagandists were usually held there. On this occasion the place was packed, and more and more people were coming.

Sasha perched herself on an extra chair added to the end of a row near the wall. It was offered to her by Matvei, a garment worker she had met at the Party district committee.

"Sit down!" he urged looking at her with large eyes deep seated in a square rough-hewn face. "Take this seat! You won't find another."

Sasha was both flustered and thrilled to find herself so close to the platform and nodded gratefully to Matvei. Nestling against the wall, she turned her attention on the proceedings in the hall.

Lenin was neither on the platform nor in any of the seats. The meeting had already been formally opened. Speeches had been delivered by prominent figures of the Party. But the man they had been talking about, whom everybody in the hall had come to see and listen to was not there....

"Didn't Maria Ilyinichna know he wasn't coming?" thought Sasha, disappointed. "Was she pulling my leg?"

Gorky appeared on the platform, lanky, bent and looking as though he were cold. His head was closely cropped, his walrus moustaches were bristling and there was a glint of steel in his blue eyes. Peering ahead, now towards the ceiling, now aside, he began to speak, emphasising his words with strong bony hands.

"There are people it is difficult to talk about," he began. "No words can convey their full significance. They are the people—how shall I put it—who are using a gigantic lever to turn history the way they want it."

Gorky here threw a worried glance over his shoulder,

as though to see whether the man who was hard to talk about, who was working with the lever of history, was sitting behind him.

"I, a word painter, as they say, must confess myself unable to find the words to depict that figure," continued Gorky hesitantly, as though he could hardly find the words he needed. . . . "Lenin is something tremendous, powerful, earthly. . . ."

His strong worker's hands with outstretched fingers, described a circle, trying with a single gesture to give shape to the tremendous, powerfully built concept of Lenin.

As everyone followed the slow gait of his discourse, watched his sweeping arms, he suddenly threw back his head, his features glowing, as though he had been struck by a great idea and proceeded to carve the earthly, homely details of a portrait, great yet plain, of the man who was his friend:

"Why, he came to my hotel room during the Party Congress in London just to make sure that my bed linen had been properly aired. London is a damp place, you know. And he was anxious about my health. That's the Lenin I know, the unexpected Lenin. . . ."

The hall was spell-bound by this moulding of the figure of Lenin. A stir and murmur ran through the rows.

"When Vladimir Lenin visited me in Capri," continued Gorky delving deeper into his reminiscences, "he caught fish with the line on his finger, laughing as only he can laugh. When we played cards, he'd laugh too—with all his heart!"

The hall came into motion as though infected with Lenin's laughter. The clapping continued for a long time. Gorky had meanwhile returned to reality from the vistas his memories had carried him to. Bending forward to thrust his cropped pate and thin neck as far out as he could, he electrified his trusting audience of Bolsheviks with the following importantly enunciated confession:

"He's busy now with global work and I find it simply terrifying to sit next to him, believe me!" He glanced anxiously over his shoulder again to see if the man whom it was terrifying to sit next to happened to be near.

Sasha's heart leapt with happy awe at the thought of how lucky she was to be alive in the world at the same time as this man.

But Lenin was still absent. He was in his study at the Kremlin, knowing nothing of Gorky's words about a dear, plain, hearty, laughing Russian who was so great of mind, so busy with global affairs that even such a writer as he found it terrifying to sit next to him....

Gorky was followed on the platform by proletarian poets who read their verses dedicated to the hero of the day.

"But the hero of the day hasn't come yet!" complained Matvei.

Alexandrovsky, a frail young man with kind delicate features was reciting his verses in tender, moving tones:

*Our commissar's steel name  
Shall ring for all posterity!*

A short stout old man in a blouse caught up at the waist with a string of red silk took the poet's place. His rosy, almost childish face was strangely contrasted by an aureole of white hair. Despite his advanced age his blue eyes were clear, astonishingly bright. This old *Pravda* writer and critic known in the Party's literature under the name of Galerka suddenly greeted a woman sitting in the hall. Everyone sprang up for a better view of her. There were cries of greeting and applause. This ovation was a tribute to Lenin's closest and dearest companion.

Handsomely dressed this time—she had had a hair-do in honour of the occasion, and not a lock was out of place

—Nadezhda Konstantinovna hid her face as though dazzled by the light.

She was confused by this unexpected ovation, and kept muttering, her happy smile spreading to her prominent eyes, kindly and somewhat startled.

“What have I to do with this?” she seemed to be saying. “There’s no need to honour me like this!”

She was still shrinking from the sea of hands extended to her, when a telegram was read from the platform.

“The Revolutionary Military Council of the Turkestan Front is sending Lenin twenty car-loads of grain on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday. Khalatov.”

The speaker promptly cited Lenin’s order regarding this gift:

“The twenty car-loads of grain are to be divided among the children of Petrograd, Moscow, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, and among the peat workers. Lenin.”

But Lenin was still absent.

An intermission was announced, and everybody was invited to the refreshment hall. The buffet was graced with large blue “willow-pattern” platters of sandwiches of sheep’s milk cheese; there were heaps of other slices of bread spread with Ukrainian bacon, and Astrakhan sturgeon—the good things the victorious fronts had sent to the hungry proletarian capital.

Real tea steamed in thick coarsely faceted tumblers of green glass. It was drunk with violently coloured fruit-drops.

“Why are we standing apart from the rest? Why aren’t we chewing something,” said Matvei to Sasha, flourishing his sandwich. “The Moscow Committee is treating the comrades today in honour of the occasion.”

“It isn’t only the Moscow Committee! The Kremlin, too, has given Moscow a thing or two today,” remarked a good-natured red-headed giant with a broad smile.

“The parties have clashed and the Slavs are embroiled!”

charted a tall thin man in an embroidered shirt with a tasselled belt round the waist. His hair stood up queerly, and his dimpled and remarkably tender chin, strange for a man, stressed the delicacy of his features. He elbowed his way through the crowd, holding the tassel of his belt. Pausing before Sasha, he looked her over humorously, grumbling: "Sasha keeps listening, but won't eat. That's why she is so thin." With this he popped half of his sandwich into her mouth.

"Marvellous!" thundered the red-headed giant with a wave of his large white hands. "The Chief Fuel Depot has not only been supplying the population of Moscow with wood, but also with bread."

Their laughter attracted a ponderous man who looked much like the famous composer Mussorgsky. He was Vladimir Alexandrovich Obukh in charge of Moscow's department of health. A personal friend of Lenin, he was a well-known figure in the Soviet capital. Looking over the crowd from his great height, he parted his forest of a beard, planted a bit of bread and dry sheep's milk cheese in his mouth, then a fruit-drop, and took a sip of tea. Suddenly he raised his coarse poorly made glass as though it were a precious goblet of wine, and declaimed:

*Twixt Limburger cheese,  
And pineapples of gold,  
Comes wonderful Strassburgpie....*

Everybody laughed, and the mighty Obukh laughed loudest of all.

"Ilyich is still holding back!" said someone at the buffet, reporting the results of the negotiations conducted with Lenin over the telephone.

"He refuses to believe that the speeches are over...."

"Nadezhda Konstantinovna has gone to phone him again...."

"He'll surely take her word for it. . . ."

The intermission was surprisingly long. Suddenly there was general excitement, everyone milling around on the spot. Then the buffet and corridor emptied as though a whirlwind had passed through them. Chairs were being shoved in and out of place in the main hall. The folding seats slammed up and down and the rows swiftly filled. Sasha found herself far from the platform now, somewhere in the depths of the hall. Rising, she saw the crowding people stiffen at the entrance. No one dared to stir.

Lenin stood on the platform.

"He's here!" The exulting cry could be heard on all sides.

Applause broke over the hall like summer rain, strong, powerful, noisily beating on the foliage, and then suddenly stopped.

In the ensuing silence Sasha thought she could hear her heart beat—even the hearts of those around her.

The excitement died down. Lenin's voice could be heard distinctly even in the last row. He thanked everybody for their birthday greetings, and Sasha was particularly pleased at the thought that *Pravda* had that day printed greetings to Lenin from the Comintern and the Sokolniki Soviet of which he was a member, and also from the "workers' section" of the newspaper.

"I'm also grateful," Sasha heard him say, "to the comrades for having relieved me of the necessity of listening to such utterly superfluous things as birthday speeches. . . ."

His further words were lost in general laughter, shouts, applause, and an ovation. Lenin waved to interrupt all this, but only intensified the storm. He was not put out, however, and continued to talk. But the hall continued its applause. A curious struggle began between Lenin and his audience. Neither would give way.

"We'll find better means of celebrating a birthday." Sasha caught these words of Lenin's through the barricade of noise.

"Here's a cartoon of this kind of celebration!" Stepping to the edge of the platform he held a drawing over his head, regarding the audience with a sly triumphant smile.

Victory was his, for the hall grew silent, no longer interrupting him. People got up to have a better look at this cartoon of a celebration whose hero was exhibiting it himself. Laughter swept from the platform to the back rows.

Sasha could not see the picture from where she sat. She only saw Lenin shed his jacket, hook his thumb characteristically in the armhole of his waistcoat, and stride back and forth along the platform waving the cartoon.

"I received it with a very friendly letter today," he went on through the noise and laughter. "Since the comrades were kind enough to rid me of the birthday speeches, I shall hand this cartoon on for all to see. Let us hope this will rid us of similar celebrations in the future!"

He raised the picture again. Lunacharsky dropped his pince-nez as he reached for it. But Lenin continued his line of behaviour, making fun of his Party comrades, of the passion for celebrations, of eloquent best wishes, and so on.

The people shouted, laughed, and clapped in reply. They found joy in looking at Lenin that way, in heaving excited rows, on this evening of his fifty-first spring, at the time when the Republic had grown stronger and was preparing for a long new journey. . . .

Lenin put his hand in his pocket, drew out a paper, and unexpectedly launched into another theme without preliminaries: He was now talking of the political tasks confronting the Party at that moment. "The chief thing

-don't get swelled heads!" These words sank into everybody's consciousness at once. It was as though he had poured a cooling lotion over the heads heated by victory.

"Our Party may land in a dangerous position—precisely in the situation of a person with a swelled head. Such a position is rather stupid, disgraceful, and comical," he reiterated.

The rows of his listeners were now sitting quietly.

"That's what I call a birthday speech!" cried someone.

"Ilyich has given them a dressing down!"

"He's given everyone a dressing down!"

\* \* \*

The musicians now appeared, heading for the centre of the stage with their instruments. A stout little violinist hurrying behind a tall lanky pianist accidentally touched Lenin with his bow. Smiling ashamedly, he apologised. Lenin stepped aside, giving way to the musicians.

The concert began. Lenin was sitting to the left of the musicians, beside the famous pianist Dobrowein. Leaning back with his arms folded he listened to Shor, Pinke, and Krein playing the Tchaikovsky Trio. Half facing the audience, he bent slightly towards his neighbour, the sad, but inspired Dobrowein. He would whisper to him now and then, and the pianist would nod and answer: Lenin's eyes were pensive, as though he were weighing something in his mind. But then his look grew tense, as if he were fathoming something in that discourse of bows and keys. Parting his arms he allowed one hand to drop on to the back of a chair, as though from fatigue. His face grew calm, the features losing their hard lines. Sasha saw the gentleness of his expression. It seemed as if something light and tender were caressing his face and eyes. Was it the music of Tchaikovsky? Or his memories?

Lenin leaned further back; he was almost lying in his chair now. His spotted tie was disarrayed, one end resting on his lapel. His lips were moving.

Sitting beside his favourite pianist, he listened first to the trio and then the Stradivarius Quartet. That was probably how he had always listened to music: at home in his childhood when his mother played the piano, at the opera in Kazan and St. Petersburg, abroad listening to Party comrades Inessa Armand and Fotiyeva playing the piano, in Capri when he heard the songs of the Italian fishermen, and in Paris when he heard the street singers. . . .

When the strings fell silent, Dobrowein took his place at the piano. The music of Beethoven resounded under his white hands soaring like a pair of birds. The people in the long narrow hall saw how gripped Lenin was by the music.

The concert was over, and taking leave of the comrades who saw him to the car, Lenin repeated:

"That was delightful music. I don't know what the speeches were like, but the music was splendid. That sonata moves me every time I hear it. . . . Thanks, comrades! Those are excellent musicians. And Dobrowein is the best of them all: he is an excellent *wein*, a superb wine, a wonderful wine!"

That is how Lenin's fiftieth birthday was celebrated in Moscow in the third spring of the Revolution.

His car rolled out through the iron gates and turned to the right, towards the Kremlin.

The evening was mild. April was nearly over. In May Pilsudski launched an attack, and the young Republic repulsed another capitalist onslaught.



**TO THE READER**

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